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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["IF YOU INTEND TO HATE ME," SAID GODFREY, "TELL ME SO, AND I PROMISE YOU I WILL RETURN THE COMPLIMENT HANDSOMELY."]

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL sat at an open window, her dreamy eyes fixed on the small patch of garden, which was bounded by a high yew-hedge—a sort of physical parable of the narrow life she had lived and loathed, whilst under the roof of her uncle, the Rev. Clement Vere.

Following her bright brown hair against the ivy-leaves which framed the window, she let her thoughts roam like restless butterflies, far from the Rectory, with all its sacred primness, to the stately Hall, already adorned by her imagination with everything that could make life worth living.

There they would talk of something more interesting than soup kitchens and parish libraries; there the entertainments would consist of something more lively than the annual school feast; there her literature would not be limited to Mr. Vere's last week's sermon, or the paltry details of the parish magazine.

"Well, Nell, a penny for your thoughts!" said a pleasant voice, as a young man with a fair, frank face sauntered up the gravel path, with his hands in his pockets.

"They are worth it, I can tell you," she said, with a grave nod.

"Out with them, then, and let me have the benefit of them," sitting down on the window-sill in such a position that he could have a good view of the pretty face opposite to him.

"Where's the penny?"

"You grasping little thing! Won't you trust me till I go upstairs?"

"I may do without it, perhaps; but a man is never to be trusted."

"So much for your experience! I don't believe you know a man besides myself."

"You forget your father."

"Well, I suppose you would trust him."

"Yes, always to give me a lecture, whether I deserved it or no."

"He takes it for granted; and is rarely wrong," with a mischievous smile.

"That shows how little you know about it!"

"After being at home for six weeks?"

"That is nothing. A man may be in the same house with a girl for a twelvemonth, and yet know very little about her when it is over."

"In a palace, but not in a nutshell."

"I never was in a palace, were you?"

"Never. From what I hear of the Somerville's place it must be something of the kind. They say it has five hundred rooms, and the deer park is one of the finest in England."

"And to think I shall be there before next month!" her eyes shining with exultation.

Cyril Vere looked down at an innocent spiler with a sudden frown.

"Yes, to be the last thing in pets—a rival to Fido and Bijou."

"I don't see why I should be ranked with the dogs," drawing up her long neck with insulted dignity.

"I dare say not; but that is no reason why you shouldn't be."

"Cyrril!" she exclaimed, passionately, "do you want to make me hate you?"

"There's no need to 'make you'; you do it already."

"You know I have always liked you better than any one else in the place."

"I shan't die of conceit, considering that there is not one of us whom you can bar."

"It is not true. Aunt Mary is sometimes very kind to me."

"I know she is; but you don't appreciate it. You feel she does you good, like an occasional dose of medicine, and you love her about as much as a black draught."

"I can't think what has put you into such a dreadful temper," looking at him with calm inquiry.

"Can't you?" his eyes flashing resentfully. "You must be very dense."

"It is ridiculous to be offended because I said 'yes,' when my godfather asked me to come."

No answer. After a pause she went on, stooping over a spray of ivy which she was trying to twine over a certain nail.

"He put it in the kindest manner, asking me to be the second daughter of the house—to comfort his poor girl for the loss of her father, to fill up, as well as any stranger could, the dreadful blank caused by her death. I couldn't say 'No,' and yet you are frightfully angry with me for saying 'Yes.'"

"Not for that," he said, hastily.

"What then?"

"It is no use discussing it," rising as he spoke. "This house has seemed a prison to you. No wonder you feel like a bird when the door of his cage is opened. The bird may live to be sorry, though. You don't remember that?"

"The bird may, when, instead of having as much seed as ever he could eat, he has to look for the berries he can't find. Thank goodness that cannot happen to me. They are sure to feed me well; and I shall have fifty pounds a-year of my very own to spend in my dress."

"You are right to say dress instead of dresses. It will almost pay for one, and, perhaps, a pair of gloves."

"What nonsense! When Aunt Mary got the one I have on, looking down at her simple black serge, "for thirty shillings."

"No doubt. At Somerville Hall you wouldn't think it good enough for a dustier."

"You are the most provoking creature I ever knew. I wonder that I have any patience with you!"

"I didn't know you had."

"If I hadn't the patience of Job you would soon see the difference!"

"I don't see how. You are always abusing me—from sunrise to sunset!"

"Excuse me, I don't get up with the sunrise, so for three hours at least you are free, and I hope you are properly thankful!"

"I shall soon be free of you altogether."

"So you will," looking up at him with innocent eyes. "How happy you will be, to be sure!"

He stooped his head, and looked straight into her face.

"Nell, have you a heart anywhere about you?"

She shook her head.

"Nowhere! It must have been mislaid when young!"

"I think it was," and he turned away with a sigh, which he strangled in a cough.

For six years Eleanor Maynard had found a home at Elstone Rectory. Her uncle and aunt had tried to do their best by the little orphan; but they did it so transparently out of mere Christian charity that the child had felt much as if she were placed in a moral refrigerator.

Cyril was the only person in the house who seemed to be cut out of something more lively and interesting than cardboard; but he was generally absent with his regiment, so he did not do much towards enlivening his home. His choice of the army as a profession had been a bitter disappointment to his father, who had intended him for the church. It was certainly unwise from a financial point of view, but his

bent in a soldierly direction was so strong that it was useless to combat it.

Nell considered him as her own particular plaything, and through all the dreary months of his absence looked forward to the day of his arrival as the one gleam of sunshine afforded her by Fate!

But, with the natural perversity of woman, she let him think that she regarded him with utter indifference, and generally contrived to be out of the way at the moment when the wheels of his dog-cart were heard on the gravel.

On the last evening of her stay at Elstone her heart softened to him to an extent that surprised herself. Pacing up and down the gravel walks in the moonlight, she forgot to find fault with the primness of the garden, she forgot to contradict him when he stated a disputed fact, and she let him have an opinion of his own on several subjects without indulging in the low, sweet mockery of her laugh.

Bereft of her tantalizing propensities, she was infinitely charming in her softer mood, and she had never been so womanly and tender as this evening, when, with drooping head and clasped hands, she walked by his side through the light and the shadow, with the moonbeams playing about her hair and the exquisite richness of her neck. To the grace of her sudden unexpected gentleness was added the irresistible, magnetic charm of knowing that all the pleasure and the pain were for the last time.

To-morrow she would be amongst strangers, who could give her all the luxury, the freedom of a life without restraint, whether of poverty or self-denial; to-day she was his to bind, if so it might be, with the chain of a love which had grown with his growth, and ripened with her beauty.

His heart grew hot within him though his hands were cold as ice. Had he a right to send her out into this new world, which was opening before him with the flutter of an engagement bidding her to her sweet independence to the only man she had ever seen? Had he been endowed with a full sufficiency of this world's goods he might have tried his chance, and played to win—for he knew that no one else could love her with such a true and unselfish love as his own—but fortune had given him the gifts with a generous hand, and he could offer her little beside a roof to cover her head, and an honest heart to shield her from harm. So he never kept his lips still, when his bones were thrumming with a thousand hopes and fears.

Though she tried to assume an air of indifference, Nell's heart was sorely troubled; the dread of the unknown future was upon her, and her cousin had never seemed so necessary to her happiness as now, when she was going voluntarily to separate herself from him for ever. After to-night she would no longer have him to tease and to play with just as she chose—after to-night she might look in vain for a glance of his kindly blue eyes, and listen in vain for the sound of his pleasant voice. She had not seemed to prize them much, it is true, whilst she had them; but now that she was about to lose them she knew that they had made the sunshine and the music of her life, and her lips quivered with a deep drawn sigh.

CHAPTER II.

"Why, Nell, one might almost fancy you were sorry to go," and Cyril Vere gave a short, dry laugh at the absurdity of such a supposition.

The only answer was a burst of passionate tears.

"Poor little thing! You've tired yourself out with your packing! It was enough to upset you, shut up in a beastly hot room this stifling day."

Still she stood before him, her face buried in her hands, her breast heaving.

Looking at her with wondering eyes, his heart began to beat with wild nervous throbs,

but he constrained himself to calmness with an effort.

"A long night's rest will do you all the good in the world before your journey. Won't you go in?"

No answer, but her head bent lower.

"You will have to get up rather early, and you won't get there till just before dinner-time. I daresay those fashionable people don't dine till eight or half-past."

"Cyril!" she raised her head, and looked at him with imploring eyes.

He looked at her tear-stained cheeks, and his lip trembled under the shadow of his moustaches. He made one step nearer to her.

"Well, dear," very gently; "can I do anything for you?"

She put her hand upon his arm.

"Let me stay!"

Something seemed to catch his breath before he answered,—

"Impossible, the Somervilles expect you—all the arrangements are made."

"But they can be upset—surely you could telegraph!"

He shook his close-cropped head. "If I did you would blame me for having done so, before the day was over."

"Indeed, indeed, I wouldn't."

"I know better. Before the end of the week you would find Elstone duller than ever, and you would hate me for having let you change your mind."

"If you want me to go, that's different."

"Want you? Good heavens!"

"I thought you would have been pleased," looking up at him with a small smile upon her lips.

"Good heavens! If I weren't a beggar, do you think I would ever let you go?" catching hold of her arm, his eyes glowing, his face white as death. "Oh, Nell, you know it, you are only playing with me."

Overpowered by the storm of passion she had raised, her head drooped, her heart beat as if it would bound out of her breast. If he had asked her then and there to be his wife she would have accepted him so gladly; but with his usual unselfishness he only thought of her future happiness, and relinquished his own. The opportunity was lost for which in after days he would have given his heart's best blood; but in such cases of honourable self-denial, fate is apt to revenge itself upon us for our contempt of her favours, by never giving us another.

"You call this house dull, as it is—think what it will be without you!" calming his agitation by the exercise of his resolute will.

"Think what it will be never to hear your step on the stairs, your voice singing like a bird about the chimney passage; think what it will be never to have a change from the eternal talk about the parish, to come back for my next leave, and find no one but my father and mother to welcome me!"

"Then why don't you let me stay?" nestling like a child to his side.

He put his arm round her. "Don't tempt me, Nell."

"Why not?"

"Because you would hate me, if I gave in—and I shouldn't like it."

"Oh, very well," drawing herself further from him. The tears rushed into her eyes, but she brushed them impatiently away. "You are more sensible than I am, because you are never led away by your feelings."

He frowned as if in pain. "You have always misjudged me; but let us part friends. There will be no time for good-byes to-morrow, let us say them now." She put her hand in his, and he felt how it trembled. "We have been more like brother and sister than mere cousins, darling; good-bye, and Heaven bless you."

He stooped his head, and yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, pressed a fervent kiss upon her lips. Shaking from head to foot, she had no thought to scold him, but fled into the house. The miserable doubt was tearing at her heart—that, in her frantic impatience of

the memory of her life, she had closed her eyes to the roses which were growing on her daily path, and chosen the flowerless briars of "the unknown."

Looking round the little room, her tearful eyes rested on her boxes, already corded for the journey of the morrow. She had it in her to undo the cords, and throw the contents on the floor; but she dared not face the astonishment of her uncle and aunt, who would certainly think she was demented, if, after all her pleasurable anticipations of life at Somerville Hall, she suddenly declared that she didn't wish to go.

No; whatever happened she had brought her fate upon herself with her own hands; and unless she wished to be held up as an object of contempt, she must face it with what courage she could muster. As to Cyril, she could not understand him. When she wanted to go, he abused her like a pickpocket; when her heart failed her, and she expressed a wish to stay, he told her that she must not think of it!

Surely, if he had liked her at all, he would have jumped at the chance, and not talked so sensibly about the *pros* and *cons*. Men never stopped to think what was wisest if they wanted a thing over-much; and he would never have remembered that he wasn't rich, if he had honestly wished her to be something more than a friend and a cousin.

A vivid blush stole over her face, in the silence and the solitude of her room. After all, she could carry away with her the remembrance of that last good-bye. He could not say it quite unmoved, and the tears were in his eyes when he kissed her.

Thinking of Cyril more tenderly than ever before, she laid her tired head upon the pillow, and promptly fell asleep. When she woke the sun was peering through the thin white curtains, the clock in the hall struck seven with a sonorous chime—the new day had begun.

In two hours' time she would have started on her journey, and turned her back for good or woe on Elstone Rectory. Her first impulse was to turn over on to her other side, and try to forget; her next to jump out of bed, and remember everything she wanted to do before she left.

First, there was the new sermon-case she had worked for her uncle, to be got out and wrapped in paper; then there was the work-case which she had embroidered for her aunt; the pins were not yet stuck into the cushion; nor the needles in the little flap of soft white flannel; and the cigar-case she had got for Cyril, with its simple leather case and silver monogram. Was it to be laid on the breakfast-table with the rest, or given in private, when no one was there to look on?

She had not made up her mind by the time she was dressed; but the sight of his fair head disappearing down the path by the river decided her; and, stealing into his room, she laid her small gift upon the table. He would find it there after she was gone, and then in common gratitude he would be obliged to write.

She watched his face, as his mother and father thanked her with unusual warmth for her little presents, and fancied she saw a look upon it, as if he were mortified at having been forgotten. But her Machiavellian plans were upset, for as soon as he had placed her in the dog-cart he ran upstairs to fetch something he had left in his room. He must have seen it; and yet he said not a word of thanks till her ticket was taken, and she herself ensconced in the corner of an empty carriage.

Then he leant over the window-ledge, and said with a smile,—

"You were determined that I should think of you, whenever I had a smoke. I shall keep it as long as I live." His voice grew husky; the guard shouted, "Take your seats;" he popped his head in, and threw something into her lap: "It wouldn't do, you know, for you to go amongst all those swells with nothing better than that," pointing to her simple, jet chain. Then he pressed her hand convulsively, drawing back only just in time as the train began to move.

She looked up in dismay from the glittering chain in her lap to his white, stern face. "Oh! Cyril, your own!" and raised her hand as if to send it back.

But he shook his head. "I have another," and smiled as brave a smile as he could manage, as he took off his hat.

Poor fellow! he could not bear to let her go without some little remembrance, and funds were low—so he had given her his watch-chain. It was solid gold and very handsome, and he had nothing but a paltry silver one to replace it, and no hope of ever being able to get another; and yet he could not grudge it. In his simple, honest heart he was delighted that she should wear it instead of himself; and if his coat could have been of the smallest service to her he would have pulled it off, and sent it after the chain without a moment's hesitation.

Generous to a fault, he would always serve a friend without counting the cost. Of better, nobler stuff than the ordinary run of mortals; the needs of others seemed ever more pressing than his own; and with the constant humility of the truly great he was apt to take the lowest place, and let the unworthy "go up higher."

Nella Maynard sat in the railway carriage, with the chain clasped tight in her hand, her pretty lips pressed close together.

"I've been a wretch to him, and so ungrateful; but oh! when I see him again, he shall know—he shall know—that I like him better than anything else on earth!"

And whilst she made the vow, with all the fervour of her new repentance, the train was bearing her further and further from him, and the shadow of the unknown future was upon her. The sorrow and the sunshine of the coming years; when she might call, and he would not answer; when she might long, with a hopeless longing for the sound of his step on the gravel, his low earnest voice in her ear. Oh! how could she face either joy or pain without him!

CHAPTER III.

WELCOME, my dear, to Somerville," said Sir Edward Somerville, a pleasant-looking, grey-haired, country gentleman, holding out his hand to help Miss Maynard out, as the brougham stopped in front of the handsome portico. "Had a tolerable journey? Heat not too much for you?"

Nell shyly followed her host across the square hall, paved with marble, into a cheerful library, where Meta, the only surviving daughter of the ancient line, was sitting at the piano. Plain, with sandy hair, freckled cheeks and almost colourless eyes; there was yet something very attractive in her countenance. Her smile was peculiarly sweet, and there was a look of patient endurance on her broad brow, which told of sorrows conquered by the force of resignation. She shook hands warmly, said that her mother would be in directly, moved forward a comfortable chair, and began to pour out the tea.

To Nell the whole scene seemed to be taken out of a book. The long oak-panelled room; with the mullioned windows; the quaint old-fashioned furniture, the high exquisitely carved mantelpiece, the two thoroughbred collies lying on the hearth-rug, the dainty Worcester tea-service, the lovely view between the soft lace curtains over park and woodland, the indescribable air of grace and refinement over all—a different atmosphere, indeed, to that of Elstone Rectory! And, in spite of her natural shyness, she drew a deep breath of satisfaction. Here it would surely be her own fault if she were not happy, for what could anyone wish for more than to have a home in such a grand old house?

In her youth and inexperience she reasoned thus, as if the happiness of life depended on the beauty or the comfort of one's *chairs* and *sofas*!

Lady Somerville came in from her drive, and greeted her new guest with a kindly smile. Unlike her daughter, she was tall, and very

elegant, and the melancholy charm of fading beauty still lingered on her aristocratic features.

After tea and conversation, Meta got up from her seat. "Would you like to come into the conservatory, and choose a flower for your hair? Godfrey is coming this evening, and he always expects us to be '*en grande tenue*.'"

"Is he your brother?" as she followed her through the glass doors, and raised her admiring eyes to the mass of luxuriant bloom. Never had she seen such a wealth of beauty before, as exotics from far distant lands raised their lovely heads between the feathery fronds of every variety of fern.

"My brother? He was to have been once if Lina had lived. Now he is more to us than ever, partly for her sake, partly for his own. The title will go to him, you know; and it seemed so natural that he should marry one of us, and inherit Somerville as well." A deep sigh, as she covered a piece of bright geranium with a pair of garden-scissors. "He is fond of red, so I always wear it. I suppose you would like to do the same?"

"No," said Nell, promptly. "I would rather have anything else! Red doesn't suit me at all."

"But he likes it—so won't you have it?"

"He doesn't know me, so he wouldn't care."

"But we always have the table decorated with red on purpose for him."

"You don't decorate your guests to match the table?" with a low laugh.

"We do, to please him."

"He ought to be immensely flattered!"

"Oh no, he takes it as a matter of course. You don't understand, because you have never seen him. Papa and mamma are devoted to him, and when he arrives we all fall down and worship him."

"Very bad for him," with a small shake of her head. "Flattery always upsets a man's digestion."

"It amuses me to hear you," looking over her shoulder, as she was in the act of cutting a lovely yellow rose.

"Why?"

"Because it seems as if the aversion were mutual. He was so desperately angry to hear you were coming."

"Much obliged to him!" colouring resentfully. "I will take care to keep out of his way as much as I can."

"I oughtn't to have told you," with a quiet smile; "but it seemed so odd to hear you talk like that after all he had said about you. Of course, after this beginning, you will end by being the best possible friends. Would you like these roses? They are 'Cloth of Golds'—the 'Marabout Niels' were over long ago."

"Why do you give her the best?" said a voice, deep but unmusical.

Both the girls started, and looked round with crimson cheeks.

"Godfrey, how long have you been there?"

"Just long enough to hear that I was to be worshipped, and that Miss—I forget her name, with a glance at Nell—" was to be my best of friends."

"It was Miss Somerville said so, not I."

"Nor I," he said coolly. "I didn't think it likely. Meta, you always give me a kiss when I arrive; and as Miss—you won't tell me her name—is going to be a fixture, it won't do to alter our habits for her sake." He stooped down and brushed her blushing cheek with his dark moustaches. Miss Somerville laughed, and looked deprecatingly at her guest.

"I am afraid you will think him rather rude, Miss Maynard."

"Not rather—but very!" she said, coldly; for it seemed to her as if a covert insult were intended by the words, "Going to be a fixture."

"Perhaps you would let me go to my room, as Mr.—whatever his name is—would evidently like to be left alone."

"Ha, ha! It is as well to begin as we intend to go on. If you mean to hate me, tell

me so, and I promise you that I will return the compliment handsomely."

"Godfrey, please remember that Miss Maynard is our guest!"

"I am not likely to forget it, as I am always to find her under your roof. I meant nothing offensive. Hatred is ten thousand times more flattering than indifference; and there are some girls who must be either detested or adored!" facing round upon Nella as she stood at a little distance, her lips quivering, her eyes flashing.

He watched her with an amused smile, as if she were an animal which he was in the act of vivisectioning, then asked, abruptly,—

"Which do you prefer?"

"It depends upon the man," she said, slowly.

"And supposing I'm the man?" fixing his bold, black eyes upon her face.

"You needn't ask!"

"I can do either as well as most people! Which will you have?"

She flushed resentfully.

"I should hate myself if you didn't hate me!"

He was not bad to look at, with his pale, thoughtful face and aristocratic bearing, but never had she felt such a feeling of passionate repulsion against any man as she did against him!

"Well I am not at all likely to disappoint you. The other"—in an undertone—"would be so infernally inconvenient. Meta, my love, when you have conducted Miss Maynard to her room, do you think you could exert yourself sufficiently to take a stroll in the shrubbery?"

"With the greatest pleasure. I'll be down directly."

"You must not mind what Godfrey says," she said, soothingly, as Nella flung her bonnet down on the bed with a gesture of impatience. "He rules us all with a rod of iron, and no one dares to rebel. You see it was so sad for him, poor fellow! Lina dying as she did!" Her voice sunk, and her eyes filled with tears. "He has never been the same since. Papa was afraid that it would have such an effect upon him that he would go out of his mind."

"I thought he must be mad or something!"

"Oh, dear no! It's his way; and nobody minds it!"

"I do, extremely!"

"But you will get used to it; and if we all are fond of you," putting her thin hand kindly on her shoulder, "it won't matter so much if he doesn't like you!"

"Not at all. But will you like me I wonder? I should like to go back at once, if you don't think you will!"

"I am sure we shall. I want you to be a sister to me; I feel so lonely. I often—often think it would have been so much better if I had been taken and Lina left!"

The shadow of a great sorrow passed across the patient face, and the tears came into the pale grey eyes.

"Heaven's ways are best," said Nella, softly.

It seemed to her to be such a mercy for the dead Lina that she was taken from the horror of such a fate as marriage with Godfrey Somerville; there could be no doubt of a merciful Providence in this case.

When the long, formal dinner was over Lady Somerville sat down in her favourite arm-chair in the lesser drawing-room, and composed herself for a nap. Sir Edward took up the evening paper, which his nephew had brought down with him, and Meta, seeing that both her parents were well employed, proposed an adjournment into the garden.

Nella willingly assented. Her mind was already oppressed with many misgivings, and it seemed as if a breath of fresh air might help to dispel them.

"Are you fond of flowers?" and Meta tilted back her chair to reach a cluster of roses.

"Very. Where I have been living the gar-

den was an old-fashioned one, with nothing but cabbage-roses, southern wood, sweet William and all those sorts of things, but yet I never felt so happy as when I could get out of the house and sit amongst them."

"That is like Lina. She was devoted to flowers, and down in that corner, beyond the cedar, she had a little garden of her own, which she loved to keep in order. If ever you want to escape from Godfrey," she added, with a smile, "take a book and sit in the seat under the honeysuckle; he will never pursue you there."

"Thanks for the hint; it may be useful."

Godfrey Somerville strolled round the corner of the house, with a cigar in his mouth.

"Just been having a look at the horses, and 'pon my word, Meta, the state of the stables is something disgraceful. Not one of the lot looks up to the mark, and Vixen's feet seemed as if they wanted a damp swab, but no one had thought of it. Just run and ask your father if he won't order it."

"He leaves all that to Hoskyns," her face flushing in unwonted rebellion.

"And Hoskyns leaves everything undone. If you don't think it worth while to mention it," with a shrug of his shoulders, "the horse will suffer; but that's your look-out, not mine."

"Of course I will, if you think it best," and Meta rose with the alacrity of an obedient child.

"So you've been living at Elstone? vegetating amongst the hay-stacks and cornfields?" turning to Nella as soon as they were alone.

"I have come from Elstone, where the vegetation seems much the same as it is here."

"Does it?" with a short laugh. "Under the ecclesiastical wing of the Rev. Clement, I should have thought you might grow up in the simplicity of the garden of Eden."

"And why not here?" raising her eyes as far as the tip of his chin.

"Here the air is full of plotting and counter-plotting, such intrigues as could have no affinity except with the exact spot where the serpent had its lurking-place. In a week's time you will have lost your look of childlike innocence. You will have got a wrinkle over your left eyebrow, and you will have graduated in deceit like the rest."

"You are mistaken," she said, coldly. "I have many faults, but deceit is not amongst them."

"Not now, but it will be. When is Cyril Vere going to be married to the heiress he hooked so cleverly?"

"I don't know," she stammered, completely taken aback by the suddenness of the question.

"And you don't want to know," fixing his eyes on her tell-tale blushes. "This comes of playing the part of Adam to two Eves at once. Sorry I mentioned it." He walked away, humming a tune from an opera, and she was left alone in the rays of the dying sun, his unanswered question ranking like a poisoned assegai in her heart. Was this the secret of Cyril's stern refusal to second her wish to stay? Was this the reason why, when he seemed to love her so passionately, he had never asked her to be his wife?

If Cyril Vere had deceived her, her one anchor of confidence was taken from her, and for the future she would only drift over the waves of life, the sport or the victim of every wind that blew.

(To be continued.)

EXCESSIVE devotion to business may be best treated, not by attacking the excess, but by opening up the many claims of family and society, of health and general intelligence, of private well-being and public duty, that are inevitably left unfulfilled. If the absorbed man can but be led to appreciate the importance of these claims, and to realize his own relation to them, he will of himself cease to be absorbed.

BROWN AS A BERRY.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Where are you going?"

Berry is stretched on a sofa near the window, book in hand, but she raises herself on her elbow and gazes at Eve in some surprise, seeing her dressed for going out.

"I am going to call on Mrs. Lee-Brooke; she was so kind in inquiring when baby was ill. Will you come?"

Berry shudders a refusal.

"I don't believe in the kindness! She was only anxious to be the possessor of the latest news. It is a point of honour with her (as it used to be with Reuter) to be able to issue the most recent bulletin!"

Without pressing the question Eve goes. If Berry had only known she would have sacrificed her every inclination in the world rather than left her side. How she repents afterwards that she did not go. Surely it must have been a freak of the Fates, in their maddest, most malicious mood!

In Eve's pocket, sheltered by her hand which is laid protectingly upon it, lies a short note from Ronald, begging—nay, almost insisting on his right—to see her before he leaves.

The ayah had given it to her, and by so doing had reinstated herself in her mistress's good opinion. She says no word to Berry, knowing that she would try to persuade her from going; and wilful as she is weak, she has determined that no one shall prevent her this last time. She will bury her romance with her own hands, and with due funeral honours.

Berry waves her handkerchief gaily from the window as she is carried past in her jampan, borne by four men in a pretty livery of blue and yellow.

Eve, leaning back luxuriously among her cushions, smiles back in farewell; congratulating herself upon having had no obstacle thrown in the way of her departure.

How often are we grateful, having no real cause; and how often do we rebel against a blessing in disguise!

If only Colonel Chester had been there, or Berry had accompanied her, Eve might have been spared the most bitter experience of her life.

Pondering upon the vagaries of chance, it almost seems sometimes as though we had no real existence at all, and were only blind puppets, fulfilling unconsciously and mechanically the decrees of an irrevocable destiny. How vain, then, appears our striving—how useless our resolves!

Surely the doctrine of "Kismet—it is written," is the saddest and most hopeless ever propagated.

With none of these misgivings in her mind Eve goes on her way, and having paid her projected visit, dismisses her jampaniers, and expresses her intention of walking home.

Four or five hundred yards from their bungalow is a clump of trees surrounding a rustic seat that Berry has laughingly nick-named "Baby's Kingdom," as it is generally taken possession of by him and his attendant train. But, to-day, there is no fear of being disturbed, as the child is still confined to the house; and there Ronald has arranged to meet her.

He is waiting when she arrives, and comes forward eagerly to meet her—so eagerly, that now she is here she wishes herself away.

"It was good of you to come!" he exclaims, with a touch of his former boyish impulsiveness.

"It was wrong—but I could not refuse!"

"Why should you have done so? It cannot be so heinous a crime to give me these few moments of your presence, when it should have been mine for life!"

"Should have been!" she repeats, in a feeble remonstrance.

"Yes, by every law of Nature! Do you think love was given us to be thwarted and controlled?"

"I chose my own fate!"

"Your choice was that of a child! You were not responsible for it. It makes me mad to think that I might have won you in spite of yourself had I persisted!"

She shakes her head.

"I could not have lived longer in poverty. It was my own selfishness, and not you to blame!" she confesses, humbly.

"I am rich now."

"Yes—too late!"

"Oh, Eve! that it should be so!"

"It is so. Let that suffice!" she answers, with a coldness born of fear—fear of him and herself.

"To have lived in the same place would have been something, but even that solace is denied me!"

"That was your own suggestion," faintly.

"Or, rather, Berry's. It was for your sake we decided it was best."

"You were both wise—wiser than I!"

"If you were foolish, it was divine folly."

"Folly not to be excused. Between us we have made for Berry a wretched time!"

"She is over anxious."

"You do not understand. More has happened than you know. That day you came to say good-bye I wrote to you—"

"You wrote to me!" he interrupts, rapturously; but then his face falls—"and I never got it!"

"It fell into my husband's hands!"

"Great heavens!"

She stands before him pale and pure, like a mediæval saint, in her simple gown and demure lace bonnet, fastened like a wimple beneath her chin. She is all in white, from head to foot, and looks as though a breath might have blown her away.

He longs to take her in his arms and shield her from all danger, only the knowledge that in his love would lie the cruellest of all, withholds him.

"How you must have suffered!" he whispers, when she does not speak.

"I did suffer; but not so keenly as she. Berry took all the onus upon her shoulders by saying it was hers!"

"And he believed?"

"Yes, he believed. How can I be grateful enough that he did! I was mad when I wrote that letter!"

"Eve, tell me what was in it?" he says, beseechingly; forgetting all else in his mad craving to hear some word of tenderness from her lips.

"Enough to have banished me from my home had it been read; and yet, Ronald, I meant no harm. We women are so weak. I felt I could not bear to lose you—perhaps for ever."

She stops, overcome with shame at her admission; but when he does not answer—his soul being too full of maddening emotions—she adds, hastily,—

"But that is all over. I know now it was for the best; and, Ronald, for my sake, believe it too."

"I will try."

"And now I must go. If my husband returns he will miss me. Say good-bye!"

Oh! the anguish in their young faces, as they look what they suppose is their last! There is an old German song, that speaks of such a parting in the quaint phraseology for which the nationality is famed. It loses much by transposition, but, roughly translated from memory, it runs as follows:—

"Where two in their last farewell have stood,
There glows the sun like their own heart's blood,
There bloom no more roses through that spring,
The birds fly over and do not sing."

The two last lines being,—

"And one must must wander in mournful mood
Where two in their last farewell have stood."

Alas! for the one that is left. It is ever the harder lot—to bear bravely and make no sign. The other may smother his care for awhile in change of scene, and, at last, even conquer it; but it is hard to go through the daily routine and show no change, no impatience, nor distaste.

As Eve pictures to herself what her life will

be now, with her unloved husband, and no outside influence to brighten it, she nearly breaks down.

In parting the soul reaches a summit of enthusiasm in no other case attained. It is an ascension to divine heights; where the sensuality of personal presence has no part, and pain lends to love a purity it otherwise mostly lacks.

Eve is a woman, with womanly faults as well as womanly virtues; but now her face is transfigured into that of an angel almost, as she stretches out her hands, with a little yearning cry,—

"Farewell, my love! farewell!" she murmurs, faintly.

Her figure sways forward and she nearly falls; her sweet blue eyes, dim with pathetic sorrow; they tell their story all too plainly.

It is well-known "how love comes from the heart to the eyes, and so into other eyes, and to the heart again." As Ronald gazes he loses his self-control, and, with a passionate impulse, takes the trembling form into his arms and clasps it closely to him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BERRY, left alone, spends an idle hour, her hands clasped above her head, and her book fallen to the floor. She herself does not heed the flight of time, being lost in a retrospection that is sweeter than any thought of the future, because more real.

Memory is the only blessing we can call our own; present happiness is so uncertain and always quickly fades, but none can take from us the glories of the past!

She starts, and raises herself upright when Colonel Chester comes in, and, in her dread lest he should begin to taunt her, as he usually does, would have left the room; but he holds up his hand.

"Don't let me disturb you," he says, politely.

"Where is Eve?"

"Gone out to make some calls. I suppose she will be home soon."

"Alone?"

"Yes; she asked me to go with her, but I was too lazy."

"I have some news for you both."

"What is it? Is Mrs. Payne coming up? Has she been worsted in her battle with the doctor's wife? or, having shown off all her new dresses there, is she going to overwhelm us here?"

"No, it is about someone in the station; but I dare say you know it already."

"Is it about that other Mrs. Chester?" asks Berry, in an awe-struck whisper, calling her by the name she has gone by since the evening they saw her first.

"No, no; what made you think of her?" with a suspicious glance from under his knitted brows.

"I—I don't know. I was only guessing."

"Then you must guess again, for you were wrong."

"Is it Lady Blanche, or Mrs. Lee-Brooke?"

"Pshaw, child!" he breaks in impatiently.

"Are you afraid to mention the name of Ronald May?"

"No, indeed; why should I be?" indignantly. "Is the news of him?"

"Yes. He is going to join the Regiment at Lucknow, and send in his papers from there. I suppose he will be leaving India this next trooping season."

"O—oh!" pursing up her mouth: trying to hide her satisfaction in an expression of surprise.

"Do you mean to say you had heard nothing of this before?" rather incredulously.

"Of course I have heard him speak of it. But I did not know if he meant it, nor that it would be so soon."

"He has always talked of going?"

"Yes."

"I remember, before we left England, that he came to me wishing to exchange. We thought it was some love-affair—"

He stops short, and like a lightning flash it

strikes him that it is his wife who was the object of Ronald May's boyish passion—and whom he loves still.

How blind he has been, how easily cajoled! It makes him mad to think of how they must have laughed together over his weak and trusting folly. Perhaps they are together now!

"Where is Eve!" he thunders out, turning upon Berry so suddenly that she starts from the sofa to her feet.

"I told you. She has gone to see Mrs. Lee-Brooke."

He swings out of the room in a tempest of rage—of which she does not guess the cause.

She is only vaguely disturbed by it and cannot resume the train of thought into which he has so rudely broken. She takes up her book and tries to read, but cannot; and after a time growing uneasy at Eve's prolonged absence, she strolls out in the verandah and stands looking down the pathway to the road, shading her eyes with her hand.

As she gazes she sees, instead, Colonel Chester, evidently having been down to the gate to watch also for her coming.

"Ayah! ayah!" he calls out impatiently.

There is no answer at first, and she is on the point of stepping forward to tell him that the woman is probably in the nursery and will not hear, when there is a flutter of white draperies and her sister's ayah glides from the thick undergrowth and stands beside him.

They have neither seen her yet, and with an instinct for which she cannot account, Berry moves away behind a trellis-work of green and watches them through the branches.

What Colonel Chester says is in a low voice that she cannot hear, but the ayah is speaking loud and fast, and seems even more excited than he. She is pointing up the hill; and is it Berry's fancy that she can distinguish the words "mem-sahib" and "May sahib"?

What could she possibly mean? Eve is out in her jampan—but at that moment Berry catches a glimpse of the men's bright liveries among the trees and knows that they at least have returned. Where, then, is Eve? Surely she cannot have been so imprudent as to meet and stay up there with Ronald May after all that has passed! And yet, if such madness were contemplated at all, it would be such a likely place!

There is no time to lose. If, indeed, Eve is there she must be warned of the impending danger.

There are two paths to "Baby's Kingdom." One from the road leading up to the side where the trees are thinnest, so that half way up the hill it could be seen if anyone is there. The other is a short cut through the ood, thick with bushes and long grass that would form a capital ambush in case of need.

It is by this latter she resolves to go as being less well-known, and, having decided, is off with lapping speed, leaving Colonel Chester and the ayah still conversing together.

Ronald's madness does not last long. Eve's sobs bring him again to his better self, and he releases her from his embrace with some muttered words that might be either apology or defiance, so incoherent are they.

She does not speak, and when he looks up timidly to see if he has erred beyond forgiveness, he sees only a scared, white face, and startled eyes staring straight forward, where, following the direction of her gaze, he, too, sees her husband coming towards them.

He is some three or four hundred yards away, and a small od divides the place where he is from where they are standing, so that he has to take a longer round to reach them.

Seeing the two forms together, though he can scarcely distinguish their faces, he does not doubt what the ayah has told him, and striding forward hastily to confront them is lost to sight for a few moments behind a hedge of briars that flanks the side of the path.

Before Eve entirely realizes her danger, the bushes behind them part suddenly, and Berry

"stands in the gap. She has won the race by about two minutes."

"Run home the way I came!" she ejaculates, breathlessly. "I will take your place."

Not waiting for her consent, she almost pushes Eve down the cud, and quick as thought whips out her handkerchief and knots it over her uncovered head.

"We both are wearing white, but he may have noticed Eve's bonnet," she explains.

"And you came all through the sun like that?" he asks, even in his excitement and distress obliged to admire the girl's bravery and staunchness.

She shrugs her shoulders.

"What would you have? I could not wait to make a toilette."

She tries to smile, but her lip quivers, she is so overcome by the heat and by fear she can scarcely stand. She stretches out her hand and lays it on Ronald's arm for support. He clasps his fingers upon it protectingly.

And so Colonel Chester finds them when he gets up, and at first can almost doubt his eyesight. He could have sworn it was his wife he saw; and yet he might have been mistaken, they are both in white gowns, and their height is much the same.

He had left Berry at home, less than half-an-hour ago. How is she here now? Are they deceiving him? If so, he will make them repent it in dust and ashes; he will put them to a test that shall be as cruel as those devised for the witches in old times. She shall pass through an ordeal by fire!

There is a malicious gleam of unholy mirth in his deep-set eyes, such as Satan might wear when he outwits a victim at the last, as he questions her:—

"Berry! what are you doing here?"

"I came to see Ronald," she falters, and is glad that so far she can speak the truth.

"How did you know he was here?"

"I—I thought he might be."

"And you came like that, with no hat and no umbrellas?"

"Yes."

"Devotion indeed! Of course, I have to congratulate you both."

Then Ronald knows that he has seen that mad embrace.

"What do you mean?" asks Berry, sharply, for the first time seeing whither her championship might lead.

"Berry and I are old friends," says Ronald, quickly, trying to step into the breach. But he is silenced by a look, and Colonel Chester turns again to his wife's sister.

"Are you engaged?"

"No."

(To be continued.)

HELEN'S DILEMMA.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HELEN'S mind was in a perfect tumult when she reached her room. She did not ring for her maid, nor divest herself of her habit; she merely sat before fire, with her hands locked round her knees, her eyes intent on the hot coals, and her whole heart given up to a raging conflict between doubt and joy.

If he expected a letter really, and it was not a mere species of mental craze, he must have written to her. Where, then, was the letter?

Ah! she was soon to know—although not within the very hour—that it lay in a safe retirement in Blanche's dressing-case. It must have been her letter!

She was in his mind—she, and no one else. This was the conviction she came to, as at last she reluctantly brought her day-dreams to a close, and rose and rang for her hand-maiden.

Never had her fellow-guests seen Miss Brown look so lovely or so animated as she did that evening; and why? Because Miss Brown's heart felt light, and the state of her mind was reflected in her face!

As I have said before, Miss Despard was not much of a horsewoman. She had the ambition to shine in the hunting-field, but she lacked two very necessary items—skill and courage. A very tame, sedate steed had always been apportioned to her; but on one fine sunny morning the host returned from his usual visit to the stables with the announcement "that Miss Despard's mount, 'Propriety,' had a very bad sore back, and could not be saddled again for some time."

This was a disappointment to her fair rider, as (it being an off-day with the hounds) a large riding party had been organized with a view to riding over to a neighbouring country mansion and having tea, and seeing the picture-gallery.

A ride of this kind was exactly what suited Miss Despard—no flying over fences, no galloping, but just a nice little orderly trot along the road, garbed in a perfectly-cut habit, and mounted on a perfectly-mannered horse, with last, but not least, a pleasant cavalier to ride at her bridle-rein. Now, thanks to that abominable beast, all this amusement was knocked on the head.

"Have you nothing else that would carry me?" she asked, with a plaintive expression, as she turned her light orbs on her host.

"Oh! well. I don't think there's another that you would care about riding. 'Fire King,' ah! 'Volcano' pulls a good bit!"

"You can have my horse with pleasure, Blanche," said Helen; "for I'm going down to see the schools this afternoon."

"Ah! I'm afraid he would be a little bit too much for Miss Despard," said the master of the house, dubiously. "He is young, and wants to be ridden with a very light hand."

"Oh! as to that, I've a light hand too, Mr. Colville," said Blanche, reddening with anger.

"I've never seen him do anything wonderful with Helen—he seems quiet enough. I can ride every bit as well as she can, in my own style. You fancy I am no horsewoman because I don't hunt, but that is not the reason at all. I don't follow the hounds, nor go across country, simply because I think it is only an amusement fit for men, and I don't approve of it for a woman!"

"Oh! all right, Miss Despard. If your cousin gives up her mount, and you think you can manage him, I'm sure I shall be only too delighted to number you among our cavalry, and 'Scatterbrains' shall be brought round for you this afternoon. I only hope to goodness," he muttered to himself, as he left the room, "that she won't give him a sore back too!"

At two o'clock all the equestrians were assembled in the hall or on the steps, and various very well-to-do-looking hacks and hunters were champing bits and pawing gravel in anticipation of a speedy start.

Helen and the hostess, both wrapped in furs, were waiting to despatch the riders before they set forth on foot.

"There comes 'Scatterbrains,' Blanche," she exclaimed, as a very handsome, showy chestnut was led sidling up to the door. "He looks a little fresh to-day, but he'll be all right if you give him a good canter across the park, and ride him on the curb."

But Blanche's courage was rapidly ebbing away at her fingers' ends, and a very limp and miserable figure she presented as she and her very fiery-looking steed marched off after the rest of the party.

She did not dare to follow most of them in a wild, gay gallop over the short green turf; No, her heart failed her.

She and one or two others remained in the hard-gravelled avenue; but it was all she could do to restrain 'Scatterbrains'—he snorted, he tossed his head up, and down with angry impatience, and he felt as light and airy on his legs as if he were on wires.

Oh! that she had had her tongue bitten through before she had ever expressed a wish to ride this odious beast, was a remark that Blanche made to herself more than once, with angry emphasis.

Out on the road they all joined forces, and Scatterbrains asserted himself by trotting out to the very front. He would lead the cavalcade in spite of her, and the trot-trot of all his equine friends in the rear only hastened his movements. He was bearing on the bit, and nearly pulling her arms out.

It all happened in a moment. A gun was fired in a plantation close to the road, and Scatterbrains made one mad plunge forward, threw up his head, snatched the reins out of Miss Despard's cold and aching hands, and, accompanied by another horse, bolted madly down the road.

For about a quarter of a mile it was a neck-and-neck race, Blanche hanging on by the crutch and shrieking in a manner fearful to hear; the man on the other animal violently sawing his horse's mouth, and muttering imprecations on him between his clenched teeth.

At last he got a pull at him, and was able to draw up; but Blanche's chestnut still tore on, goaded to still greater speed by the alarming screams that were proceeding from his rider.

For two miles he continued his headlong career, and then, in suddenly darting round the sharp angle of a demesne wall, he lost his legs and came heavily down, half-rolling over on his unfortunate burden.

The rest of the party soon carried on the scene, and found Scatterbrains, with broken knees and broken bridle, standing in the middle of the road, half-covered with mud, looking rather ashamed of himself, and being held by a little ragged boy, and an old woman, the proprietor of an adjacent donkey and cart, supporting Blanche, who was lying against the bank—dead, to all appearances.

But she was not dead, only stunned, and very badly injured internally. Her ribs were crushed in, her arm was broken.

Of course these misfortunes were not discovered there and then on the road, but when she had been carefully removed in a slowly-pacing carriage to Mr. Colville's, and submitted to the inspection of no less than four doctors.

Yes, she was certainly in a very bad way—very bad, indeed. Her mother had better be telegraphed for at once! Mrs. Despard arrived by the first train the following morning, and was received in the sick room by Helen, who had undertaken the first night's nursing.

Mrs. Despard's dismay was very great—greater than her actual grief. Was it possible that she was to be the miserable mother of two crippled daughters? It were better almost that Blanche should die, wringing a tear from the corner of her worldly old eyes.

The patient's condition was so very critical that it was judged best to prepare her for the worst. If, as was likely enough, inflammation were to set in, her life would be reckoned only by hours. But who was to tell her? Who was to undertake this painful office?

Not her mother—oh, no! Mrs. Despard put the idea away from her with a shudder. Her trouble, she told Mr. Colville, was bitter enough without that!

Helen was her next nearest relative; and time was flying! Helen was to tell her cousin that her hours were numbered!

"Yes, my dear, you must," urged Mr. Colville, anxiously. "You see her mother is so out of it. Our clergyman is in London this week, and it will be better for you to break it to her than the doctor. A hint in these cases is sufficient," he added, in a whisper.

So, just as the lamps were beginning to be lighted, and the shutters closed and daylight shut out, Helen stole into the sick room on her fatal errand, and the nurse crept down to her tea.

The patient was lying on her back, with her face as white as death, her eyes glassily fixed on the light. Helen took a low seat near the foot of the bed, and said very gently,

"And how do you feel now, Blanche—any easier?"

"Yes, I'm not in much pain—not nearly as much as you would expect from all these

broken bones! At first it was awful—awful! but now I scarcely feel any pain at all."

Helen turned very pale. This immunity from pain was the most deadly of symptoms. She glanced at the pinched face among the pillows, and her pale lips parted as if about to speak.

"What were you going to say, Helen? Why do you look at me in such an odd way? Do you think I am very ill?"

"Yes, dear, very ill!" returned Helen, in a low voice.

"Do you think I am going to die?" she asked, in a horrified whisper.

"I cannot tell. You are very ill; but you are in Heaven's hands! We must all die some time!" faltered Helen.

"I see you think badly of my chance, Helen!"

For some moments there was a dead silence—a silence only broken by the ticking of a little clock on the mantel-piece. Helen could not speak; she was crying quietly. It seemed so awful to her that this girl, so little older than herself, should be now standing alone on the very threshold of another world, she who, the day before yesterday, had seemed the strongest and most long-lived looking of them all!

"Don't cry, Helen!" came the voice from the bed. "I can't tell you how it hurts me to see you crying for me! If you only knew all you would never speak to me or look at me again, much less shed a tear on my behalf!"

Helen raised her eyes in vague interrogation.

"If you mean about when I was governess, don't think of it, dear Blanche! I have freely forgiven everyone long ago! Don't think of it again; and you must not talk or excite yourself. Let me read to you," reaching her hand towards a prayer-book.

"No, no!" with an impatient gesture, "not yet. If I am dying I won't go before I have confessed to you, and told you all. I believe that what you think is true, for I feel so different and see things so differently to what I did two days ago! Helen, did you ever guess that—I—loved Rupert?"

"Why speak of such things now, dear Blanche?"

"Because I must—I must!" she reiterated. "And you came between us! He never cared for me—never! but he might have, if he had never seen you!" she concluded, with an impatient sigh.

"Don't, Blanche! Why allude to it now—it is all at an end long ago!"

"Please let me speak. Hear me patiently."

"Have you never guessed who it was who discovered Mrs. Glass? It was I! Who it was that confronted Rupert with her and Teddy, in spite of his strongest resistance? Who it was that showed him your letter? Well!—with a long gasp—"It was I! I parted you then, as I thought for ever, but Fate was too strong for me! As the rich Tasmanian cousin you came back and retrieved—nay, more than retrieved—all! Don't speak yet, hear me out!" she continued, gasping for breath. "It was a hard matter to keep you and Rupert apart, but I managed it! I poisoned your mind against him, and I roused his pride. Fate helped you again by that meeting at Richmond, but I had gone too far to go back. I felt that desperate events need desperate remedies, and I intercepted the letter—yes, his letter! I took it from the footman that evening a few hours after the party—took it from him with my own hands, and said that there was no answer! Yes, you may well look as if you were turned into stone! I did not open it! I put it away in the drawer of my dressing-case. I looked at it often—it is there now! Take it. The key is on that bunch—a small gilt one. Take it, and forgive me, if you can!" and Blanche turned her face away, and breathed hard.

"Oh, Blanche!" said Helen, rising, and at last finding speech, "I must not say anything to you now; but, dear Blanche, how could you? If you only knew how very, very miserable

the loss of that letter has made me I am sure you would never have done it!" putting her hands before her face, and letting the tears trickle through her fingers.

"It would not have mattered! I would have done it just the same!" panted Blanche, excitedly. "You had better know at once how wicked I am so that you need not regret me too painfully. No one will grieve for me much, for I have never given anyone any occasion to do so. Ah, mine has been a wasted life! Let it be a warning to you—net that you require it, for you are every bit as good as I am bad! Let me see you take your letter; it will be a load off my mind! Go and get it now!" impatiently.

And Helen, after fumbling among strange keys and bungling with a strange lock, found the long-lost missive, lying face upwards in the drawer of the dressing-case. How gladly she possessed herself of the treasure needs not to say, but this was neither time or place for its perusal.

She contented herself with putting it inside the bosom of her dress, over her loudly-beating heart, and resuming her place beside the patient, measuring out and administering her sleeping draught, and bathing her face with aromatic vinegar, for Blanche was completely exhausted by her recent confession, and lay speechless and breathless, and doing all the various duties of the sick room with the anxious care of a finished nurse.

When Blanche had fallen into a deep sleep, and the hospital nurse had resumed her sway, she stole away to the privacy of her own room at last, to read her long-delayed letter.

It was everything that it ought to be. It far surpassed her warmest expectations; and as she finished its perusal for the fifteenth time she felt quite angry with herself for feeling so unfeelingly happy when her cousin lay dying in the room beneath. As to her cousin's behaviour about this very letter, what could she think or say now? Does not death disarm us all?

CHAPTER XL.

BUT Miss Blanche Despard was not going to die, after all! No, in this she showed her usual obstinacy. The doctors had declared that she could not possibly live—that if she did, it was a case in five hundred. And it was a case in five hundred! Her wily constitution asserted itself, her bones knit with incredible ease, her appetite never failed, her sleeping powers were marvellous, inflammation was kept at bay, and Blanche lived—lived, let us hope, to be a wiser and a better woman.

She was moved after a time to London, then by easy stages to the South of France, and soon she was able to stroll along the Promenade des Anglais at Nice, and see the world once more. Her mother was with her, of course; but Katie and Helen were taking care of each other and Mr. Despard at Kingham.

After a time Miss Blanche began to pluck up her looks and her spirits, to take an interest in society, to take a special interest in a good-looking, but by no means wealthy young Italian count, who bore a faint resemblance to her cousin Rupert. The Count speedily developed a remarkable sympathy for the fair young English invalid—a sympathy that became more and more uncontrollable as the rumours of her *dot* increased in magnificence.

She really had a very nice little fortune, nearly eight hundred a year of her own, left to her by her godmother and namesake, and eight hundred would be gladly increased to a thousand by her loving father if any decent fellow would take Blanche off his hands.

"Countess Ravani!" Yes, it sounded very well, said Blanche to herself, reflectively. She would like living in the sunny South; it would be quite too nice to inhabit a lovely old palace on the banks of the Arno!

She knows heaps of English who lived all the year round in Florence, and the soft, easy

dolce far niente of the Italian domestic life appealed to her naturally lazy disposition.

Already in her mind she had almost entirely refurnished the ancient abode of the Ravanis. Persian and Turkish rugs, old tapestries, old bric-a-brac, and a small amount of ordinary chairs and tables would be all they would require. Plate, linen, china would come in the form of wedding presents.

Father should give a landau and pair, mother a grand piano, Kate and Loo-Loo a silver five o'clock tea-service, and Helen—Helen, who had heaps of money—Helen's forgiveness and generosity had salved over her very readily-appeased conscience, and she was seriously debating in her own mind whether Helen ought to give her diamonds, or Russian sables, when the mainspring of the whole affair was ushered into her presence.

He came at a propitious moment to press his suit. He was by no means a bad-looking young fellow.

Shm, dark, and gentlemanly, he sang pretty little Italian love songs in a charming tenor voice; he danced divinely. And he was really rather in love with pale-haired, pale-eyed, elegant-looking Miss Despard; and it would be a prudent marriage—a thousand a-year, and large possibilities at the beef-eating father's death.

So Blanche made her suitor very happy. She accepted him with well-assumed, graceful reluctance, and found herself very well contented with her fate.

Every day she compared him mentally with her cousin Rupert, and every day her cousin came off second best. His hands were not nearly as small, his voice as soft; his dancing and singing were decidedly inferior to Victor's; his manners were not to be named in the same breath, and gradually he faded away from her meditations altogether.

There was no use in returning to England till the affair was concluded. Thus wrote Mr. Despard, whose desire to see his eldest daughter settled, and that in a foreign land, was scarcely complimentary, and did not say much for his paternal feelings.

He himself would go to Nice to grace the ceremony and to give her away; and early in April all the English society who were entitled to invitations were present at a very grand wedding at the English church.

Blanche looked quite the Countess in a magnificent white wedding gown, with a stamped velvet train, and three large diamond stars in her hair—Helen's wedding present.

As she came down the aisle, now Madame Ravani—as Madame Ravani we may drop the curtain over her, and let her pass from the scene—it may seem that she was treated far beyond her deserts. That, by the just, poetical fitness of things, she ought to have been a scoured, crippled, malignant old maid to the end of her days.

But who knows what Fate may yet have in store for her? Who knows what stormy matrimonial outbursts may be enacted within the sleepy old walls of the Palazzo Ravani? Who knows if the Count be not a gambler, or a gay and inconstant Lothario—who knows?

When Mr. Despard went south to the wedding, Helen and Katie were left entirely to their own resources. They despatched their presents and their good wishes, and kept the great festivity at home.

They had descended to the little blue drawing-room now and enacted the part of the ladies of the house, which had so long been played by Blanche and Mrs. Despard. They were popular hostesses, and many of the neighbouring young people were fond of coming over to Kingham, just dropping in for a cup of five o'clock tea. Katie Despard was so amusing, and her cousin was so pretty!

On this especial afternoon Katie is doing the honours alone. She is sitting before her little tea-table, pouring out tea into the very same cups and saucers that we saw the night of Helen's arrival, and giving a detailed description of her sister's wedding to two very lively

young ladies, one active-minded, elderly lady a son to leave—who came to see the heiress trotted out—and a tea-loving curate.

"And so your cousin, Sir Rupert, has come home, Katie!" said one of the Miss Fosters, as she drew off her long-buttoned glove and helped herself to hot buttered tea-cake.

"Rupert come home!" echoed Katie, setting down the teapot, and speaking in a tone of delighted amazement. "How do you know? We have not heard anything about it!"

"How very odd!" said Miss Foster, rather triumphantly. "Does he not write?"

"Oh, sometimes; when the spirit moves him. The last we heard of him he was at Chicago."

"Well, he is home now! I daresay you will see him soon."

"Who told you so? Have you seen him?"

"I travelled down with him last night," put in Captain Foster, as he helped himself to another lump of sugar. "He was looking very fit, too. Told me he had just come up from Liverpool—came over in the *Servia*!"

"Well, we are quite used to his coming and going in a most sudden manner, but I really do think—"

Whatever Katie really did think was not to be known at present, for her remark was interrupted by the entrance of the gentleman in question.

"Talk of an angel!" cried Miss Letty Foster, in a tone of gleeful welcome.

"We have just been telling your cousin you had arrived," said her brother, cordially.

"I think you might have written a line, Rupert," said Katie, with a smile of welcome and expostulation, after he had greeted everyone in the room and found a seat. "Now what have you to say for yourself, sir?"

"We had a fearful time coming across the Atlantic, with a broken shaft—three weeks at sea. I never was so sick of anything in my life!"—reaching a ready hand towards the tea-table. My ideas are all mixed—my brains are like wool! Hulloa! what's this? Looks like wedding-cake!"

"And so it is!" returned Katie, quietly. "It would be a terrible blow to Gunter if you had mistaken it for anything else!"

"And who has been getting married—eh?" gaily.

"Ah! who, indeed!" said Katie, mischievously. "You keep all your news to yourself, and we can't do better than serve you in the same way."

"But who?" he reiterated. Not Dolly? Come, Katie!"

"No, not Dolly. A lady—a lady you have often met here. There's a broad hint!"

But the broad hint had the effect of producing a very sudden change in Sir Rupert's expression. He changed colour. His voice took quite a different inflection. He dropped the morsel of cake (as if it were a scorpion) into the saucer of his tea-cup, and pushed both hurriedly away.

"I know who it is," he returned, with curious composure. "It is Miss Brown."

The above little by-play had by no means been lost on Katie, and for a moment, with a woman's delight in a man's discomfiture under similar circumstances, she made no reply.

"No, you are wrong," she said, at last. "It is not Miss Brown who has been married. It is Blanche! This is Blanche's wedding-cake," once more moving his teacup towards him. "You must eat a bit, just for luck!" she added, authoritatively.

"Blanche!" he echoed, with a look of indescribable relief. "Well, I am behind the times!" But when one has been in the Far West for two months, and then drifting about the Atlantic in a broken-down steamer, one does get rather out of it. And who is the happy man!"

"You'll never guess, if you guessed for a fortnight!" replied Katie, triumphantly.

"Then, in that case, you may as well tell me at once," he returned, with a laugh.

"Your new cousin is an Italian count, and Blanche is now the Countess Ravani!"

"Nonsense, Katie! You are joking! pushing back his chair, and gazing at her with a smile of incredulity.

"Not a bit of it. I have just been relating all the details of the wedding, which was celebrated at Nice, to Mrs. Foster," looking towards that very plump lady. "You believe in it, do you not?" endeavouring now to make the conversation a little more general.

Her example was followed by Rupert, who began discoursing with the Misses Foster about the weather, his travels, and various county topics; and they, now that the little party had been augmented by a handsome and eligible bachelor, became more and more animated and agreeable.

"And so I find my cousin Katie here all alone, and all the rest of the family in the south of France!" he said, half to his fair companion and half to Katie. "Even the indomitable Loo-Loo is at school."

"Oh! Miss Brown is here," returned Miss Foster. "There she is!" she exclaimed, half rising, "riding up the lawn now."

This little piece of news caused her neighbour very nearly to capsize his tea-cup, so great was his amazement.

"I had no idea," he muttered, lamely. "You see the result of being a bad correspondent."

"Well, I am a bad correspondent myself," said Miss Foster, sympathetically.

"By Jove! and so am I!" chimed in her brother. "I suppose it runs in families."

"What runs in families, Captain Foster?" said a pleasant, merry, young voice; and Helen, with her hat and riding-whip in hand, joined the circle, having entered by the large drawing-room. "I think," smiling at Mrs. Foster, "we all met in the High-street of Wilmington not very long ago. Katie, my dear, I did all your errands. I am just dying for a cup of tea—and—"

At this instant her eye, which had been swiftly travelling round the circle, and gradually accustoming itself to the dim light of an April evening, fell upon a gentleman who had been sitting with his back to the light and now rose, and extending his hand, said,—

"I don't think you met me in the High-street of Wilmington this afternoon, Miss Brown. I hope you have not forgotten me!"

For quite half a minute Helen could find no words. They came—they stuck in her throat—but they could get no further. At last she made a great struggle with her scattered wits, and stammered out,—

"How do you do, Sir Rupert? When did you come home?"

"Only last night," offering his chair. "I landed in Liverpool yesterday morning."

"And he has been telling us all his adventures," volunteered Miss Foster, with delightful volubility. "All about the Rocky Mountains, and New York, and the West Indies, and his horrid passage over. Quite too delightfully interesting!" she concluded, as though interpreting the experiences of a foreigner for Helen's edification. "Have you told us everything?" she continued, beaming up at Sir Rupert as he stood before her with a plate of estates in either hand.

"You can't expect to be his mother confessor, Letty," said her brother, with a laugh. "I think there is one little adventure he won't tell you about. Ha! ha!"

This was merely intended as a bit of would-be graceful badinage, but somehow it fell very flat. Sir Rupert looked annoyed, Katie coloured crimson; for everyone knew that Captain Foster had the episode of the Brazilian duel before his mind's-eye.

However, the curate gave a clever turn to the conversation by recurring to the subject of letter-writing, and the fact that good correspondents were rife in some families and absent in others.

"I myself," with the air of a man who is justly proud of the admission, "am an excellent correspondent. I write twice a week to my mother—I write every second mail to my brother in Ceylon—"

"Yes, there is somebody else to whom you write every day," interrupted motherly Mrs. Foster in a stage whisper.

The poor curate blushed to the very collar of his coat, but still proceeded manfully with his bantering.

"I do not think that, to my knowledge, in the whole course of my life I ever left a letter unanswered."

"That is more than you can say, Miss Brown," murmured Sir Rupert, in a tone of reproachful significance from his seat, which was very close to hers.

"I consider it," continued the curate, as if he was preaching from a given text, "an act of the grossest rudeness to leave a letter without a reply. It is an unpardonable slight."

"Do you hear that, Helen?" whispered Rupert.

"The cap does not fit me," she replied, in the same low tones.

"It is exactly the same," continued Mr. Lambkin, "as if a person spoke to you and you made no answer."

"Exactly the same," acquiesced Sir Rupert, unhesitatingly.

"And is most hurtful to people's feelings in many instances, and sunders many friendships."

"I believe you are speaking from experience, Lambkin," said Captain Foster, standing up, and also sharing the way. "It sounds exactly as if you had a fellow-feeling for some poor devil whose ladylove treated his effusions with silent contempt—oh! Maybe the case was your own?"

"Really, Tim, you are too ridiculous!" said his fond mother.

"I declare, if ever I fall in love, I shall do all my correspondence by wire—save a lot of bother, and would be something new."

"Yes," agreed his youngest sister; "and if you were brought up for breach of promise, I suppose telegraph messages go for nothing?"

"Now, my dear girls, we must not stay here all the evening talking nonsense," said their mother. "I see Jones is at the door, and we really must be going." So escorted to the carriage by the gentleman she and her daughters had adieu to their hostesses, and swept out of the room—still in the full tide of conversation.

Katie and Helen remained behind, and as the former rose from the tea-table and shook a few cake crumbs from her lap into the tray, she said,—

"I shall leave you here to have a *little* tête-à-tête with Rupert. I'm going to ask him to stay and dine, and I must just go and see if there will be enough dinner to warrant the invitation. I'll leave you to entertain him for awhile," limping towards the door.

"No! no! You will do nothing of the sort!" cried Helen, hastening after her with scarlet cheeks. "I must go and take off my habit. I cannot possibly—"

But the green swing-door had already closed behind Katie, and whatever Helen's objections were, they were not destined to reach her ears; and Sir Rupert, entering from an opposite door, effectually cut off her retreat by immediately coming towards her and telling her that "he was delighted to have an opportunity of speaking to her for a few minutes alone."

These few minutes lengthened in to thirty, and, needless to say, passed with inconceivable rapidity. The matter of the letter was cleared up and explained, Sir Rupert taking anything but a lenient view of his cousin's share in the transaction. The *pros* and *cons* of the duel were confessed and discussed, but it was quite ten minutes before Helen would allow herself to be persuaded that Sir Rupert had not given some good grounds to the *señorita* for her hallucination.

"You know you had no business to go riding, and star-gazing, and guitar-playing with her!" she observed impressively. "It was quite enough to make her think all manner of things!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear Helen. Such little frivolities are merely the natural and innocent

amusements of one's idle hours out there; and it is quite the custom of the country!"

"I believe you trifled with the poor girl's affections, and I don't call that at all a nice way of spending your time!" persisted Helen.

"Make your mind quite easy about her affections; she has already bestowed them and her hand elsewhere. She has married a wealthy fellow-countryman, and made a most excellent match, and I sent her a wedding present from New York."

"You did?"

"Yes! And probably she will return the compliment. I hope she will let her gift take the form of some boxes of those excellent dried fruit. You never tasted anything more delicious—and I know you have a sweet tooth!"

"You seem to take a great deal for granted, Sir Rupert—your wedding and your presents included," she replied, with a smile.

"One wedding in a family makes another," he observed, complacently. "Not that I can ever bring myself to think of the present bride with equanimity. I don't think I shall ever speak to her again. Still, in one way, I shall follow her example."

"Whose example?" said Katie, whose entrance had been quite unnoticed, now hobbling up to the fire.

"Blanche's example!" he replied. "I intend to be married before the roses are out."

"Oh, indeed! And the lady?" looking towards Helen inquiringly.

"Do not appeal to me, Katie, I know nothing about it," she replied, with crimson cheeks that belied her words; "and I am going to dress."

"Well, I am delighted that it is all settled—and settled under my auspices," said Katie, an hour afterwards, as they sat at dessert over the walnuts and the wine, Helen, looking perfectly lovely in one of her most becoming dinner-gowns, sitting vis-à-vis to Sir Rupert, who seemed to be very well satisfied with his surroundings.

"Now that the servants have gone I feel as if I should like to get up and sing, or make a speech, and give a toast," exclaimed Katie, who was in exuberant spirits. "Fill your glasses, Rupert and Helen. I drink to your health—long life and happiness. Who would have thought that everything would have turned out so well, and that when father and mother come home next week they will find that we are going to have a wedding at Kingsholme on our own account? Considering, too, the horrible scrape you got into out in Brazil, Rupert, you must wonder at your own good luck in being here in the character of an accepted suitor. Please accept my best congratulations, and please to acknowledge that you have fared better than you deserved."

"Thank you very much, Katie," he replied, with a laugh; "your speech is a curious combination of reproof and good wishes. I accept the one with the deepest humility, the other with the warmest gratitude; but you must admit," smiling significantly at his beautiful betrothed, "that bad as my scrape was, it was nothing in comparison to Helen's Dilemma."

[THE END.]

BEES LABOUR.—The bee has long been a type of the industrious worker, but there are few people who know how much labour the sweet hoard of the hive represents. Each head of clover contains about sixty distinct flower tubes, each of which contains a portion of sugar not exceeding the five-hundredth part of a grain. Some patient apiarian enthusiast, who has watched their movements, concludes that the proboscis of the bee must, therefore, be inserted into 500 clover tubes before one grain of sugar can be obtained. There are 7,000 grains in a pound, and as honey contains three-fourths of its weight of dry sugar, each pound of honey represents 2,500,000 clover tubes sucked by bees.

WEARY MOTHERS.

Tired mothers, do you think
When standing on the brink
Of the broad river, flowing to the sea,
That after the farewell,
The long, the sad farewell,
That by the little ones we may forgotten be?

Sometimes with folded hands,
Weary of life's demands,
We mothers, in our infinite unrest:
With heart-ache, and the strife
Of a worn-out wasted life,
Only yearn, as mothers can, to be at rest.

The tender, clinging arms,
The many nameless charms
Of childhood, are forgotten in our cares;
And then impatient, we
Oft check the childish glee,
And hasty words will meet them unawares.

So teach the dear home-band;
So guide the yielding hand;
So strengthen them by prayer on bended
knee;
So gird life's armour on,
That when the victory's won
Mother's love will be a cherished memory.

A. H. P.

THE LILY AND THE ROSE.

CHAPTER XXII.

In a few minutes after the terrible revelation Lady Avonley had made concerning Philip Granville, Greta, by a great effort recovered herself, and said, with a forced smile that looked strange on such white lips,—

"You must have been misinformed, mamma! Philip can never have done this thing!"

"He is accused of it anyhow, and on evidence that cannot be gainsaid, unfortunately!"

"Who was your informant?"

"General Melthorpe. The young man was brought up before him this afternoon."

"This afternoon!" repeated Greta, in a stupefied way.

"And General Melthorpe was obliged to commit him to prison, he says the proof was so convincing."

"Whose cheque was he supposed to have forged?"

"Lord Darminster's. It seems he gave Mr. Granville a cheque for one hundred pounds for his poor, and it was taken to the bank by Philip himself; and he told the clerk to place it to his father's account—"

"Well!" urged Greta, as her mother paused. "I don't remember all the details, but I do know that he took thirty or forty pounds away with him—"

"Out of the cheque?"

"Naturally! Where else could it have come from? Everyone knows that Philip Granville is as poor as a church mouse."

"Go on—what then?" said the girl, eagerly.

"He spent the money, I suppose. Only five pounds were found upon him out of the forty, General Melthorpe told me."

Greta hung her lily-like head, and the whiteness on her lips was brightened by a sudden crimson stain, which dyed her whole face, up to the soft line of curls which edged her forehead. She, so proud and pure—she knew what shame was, for the first time; and bent under it as the flower to which she had been so often compared, bends under the storm.

But not—she would not believe this thing of him, from her mother's lips alone. She knew that Lady Avonley would fain blacken Philip's character in order to disgust her—

and what way better than the one she had chosen!

Greta would have given all the world if she could have had Alice to comfort and advise her at this moment, for she felt so weak and tremulous she needed someone to lean against. But knowing she must suffice to herself strengthened her mentally, and she rose to the occasion. Seeing she did not care to talk any more, Lady Avonley, who had struck her blow and was quite willing that it should have time to rankle, took up the newspaper, and paid no more attention to her daughter.

Even when Greta rose presently she did not look up; not wishing, evidently, to give the girl any excuse for resuming the conversation, and being in the hall the other caught up a cloak and hat, that always hung there for garden wear, and went out into the night.

Lady Avonley fancied she heard the front door go, certainly; but she was interested at the moment in the account of a fashionable wedding, and paid no heed; whilst Greta hurried through the darkness to Aylesford Rectory—past the Haunted Elm, at which she never so much as glanced, being too absorbed in her own painful thoughts, until she came to the gate that led to Mr. Granville's house.

Here she paused for a moment, almost frightened at her own temerity, and then made an effort over herself and went on.

The door was answered to her by rather a grim-looking, elderly woman, whom Greta had so often heard described; she felt almost inclined to shake hands with her, knowing well that, in spite of her unprepossessing exterior, she was a faithful and devoted servant, and loved Philip as if he had been her own son.

Her eyes were red, Greta noticed, taking it as a bad sign; and her heart sank as she asked if Mr. Granville were at home.

"Yes, he is at home, miss," Deborah replied. "But I don't think he will see anyone."

"He is in trouble, then?" asked Greta, brokenly.

"Yes, miss."

"Tell him I want to see him about Mr. Philip," faltered the girl; and after one keen glance into the beautiful white face, Deborah went.

She returned in a minute to say that Mr. Granville would receive her, and she followed Deborah into the quaint old study where the rector passed most of his time amongst his beloved books.

The old man rose as she entered, and bowed low. He did not recognize her she saw, and she had time to note how pale and troubled he looked whilst he was setting her a chair, and courteously begging her to be seated.

The door closed on old Deborah, and then Mr. Granville said, with a sort of suppressed eagerness,—

"You wish to see me about my son, madam, I believe?"

"Yes! I heard something so terrible—so impossible—to-day. I did not believe it. I know Philip is the soul of honour, and I thought it was a cruel scandal. But you look so sad, and so does Deborah; and you make me afraid!" she ended, with a gasping sigh.

He raised his dim eyes to her lovely white face.

"Madam," he said, formally, "before I answer you, I must know what right you have to question me?"

She rose impulsively from her seat, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"Is this true?" he asked, pushing her from him the better to scan her face.

"Yes, it is true. I have loved him ever since I was quite a child, and he has loved me; and I know Philip would do no wrong."

The old man hung his head silently.

"You must believe in him, too. You are his father!" exclaimed Greta, excitedly. "Why don't you answer, sir?"

"I don't know," replied the old man, confusedly.

"You never mistrust him?"

"No! and yet—"
 "What?" she said, sharply.
 "Must I tell you the truth?"
 "Yes!" and she wound her hands tightly in each other as if she braced herself to listen.
 "Well, Philip has had a good deal of money of late."

"I know!" with a nervous tremor. "His godmother, Miss Hanwell, sent it to him."
 "I telegraphed to her three hours ago, just to ask if she had communicated with my son, and she replied that she had not."

"She must have forgotten."
 He shook his head mournfully.
 "She could not have forgotten so soon."

"Why not—she is old?"
 "I am old, madam, and yet I do not forget one day the letters I wrote the day before, and if I did not remember sending a cheque it would be easy to refresh my memory."

"But you did not ask about a cheque?"
 "No, because my son told me the cheque came in a letter from Miss Hanwell, which she requested him to keep secret; and if there was no letter there was no cheque."

"Perhaps she denies the fact because she wishes it kept a secret," suggested Greta.

"She is a thoroughly upright, conscientious woman, and would not be guilty of a falsehood, I am sure. Besides, I said in my telegram that it was of vital consequence to me to know if she had written to my son or not."

"I see," Greta said, and there was a long pause. At last she added, shrinkingly, "What does this mean?"

"I don't know, and I dare not think!"

"Oh, Mr. Granville!" she cried, passionately. "You must not let yourself think any wrong of Philip. I have such faith in him myself, that I would not believe he had done this thing unless he told me so with his own lips."

"Heaven bless you for those words!" exclaimed the old man with deep feeling. "It is a comfort to feel that one person in the world believes in my unfortunate boy."

"And will believe in him always," continued Greta, with enthusiasm. "But how can we help him, Mr. Granville? He must not remain in prison!"

"I am afraid there is no help for that until the trial is over," was the sad reply. "They would not accept bail in a serious case of this sort."

"What would be his sentence supposing he were condemned?" inquired Greta, in a low, shivering voice.

"Five years penitentiary servitude, at the least!"

"Good heavens! But we must save him, Mr. Granville!"

"We must prove him innocent, you mean. That's the only way to save him, if liberty is to have any sweetness. I know Philip too well to suppose he would care to come forth into the world again bearing a stained name."

"He might live down the shame."

The old Rector shook his head.

"I do not believe in living down shame. A man may go amongst strangers at the other end of the world, and yet he will always find someone who knows his miserable secret, and will whisper it abroad just as he is beginning to hope the dead past has buried its dead. No; I love Philip dearly—he is my only child—all I have to live for now that his mother is gone, and yet I pray he may hide his head in prison if he cannot hold it up boldly before all men."

"And I," she said, "pray that he may come back to us somehow, anyhow, rather than not at all."

Mr. Granville scrutinised her keenly, and at last he said,—

"I see you really love Phillip even more unselfishly than I do. He is fortunate indeed to have inspired so much affection."

"He deserves it all, Mr. Granville."

"I hope so."

"Do you doubt it, then?" she asked, nervously.

He hesitated perceptibly over his answer, which was an evasive one after all.

"Why should I? You judge people not by one supposed action, but rather by their antecedents. My son was always upright and honourable; is it, therefore, probable that he should suddenly have become a thief?"

"A thousand times 'No!'" exclaimed Greta, emphatically.

"Then we may venture to judge him by the past until they prove we are wrong," returned Mr. Granville, who was evidently only too glad to be encouraged by her faith now that his own was growing faint. "But I wish I had died ere this thing had come upon me."

"And yet he never needed you so much!" exclaimed Greta, reproachfully.

"That is true, poor lad!" and the old man's face softened, as he seemed to see Philip, as a little child again, toddling along by his beautiful mother's side, whilst he watched them both with infinite fondness and pride.

The mother was dead and gone now, and only the child was left—her child—whom she had commended to him with almost her last breath; and should he forsake him even in thought?

A thousand times "No," he told himself in Greta's emphatic words, and taking her hand in his he raised it to his lips, saying brokenly,—

"Thank you for the reminder; I will do all I can for him, be sure of that."

"I know you will," she answered with a smile, such as Lord Darminster would have bought at a high price indeed—it was so divinely sweet. "Poor fellow! he depends upon us two, and I am so helpless. I would move the whole earth to be of use to him, and I have to sit at home with my hands folded eating my heart out, because I know that open championship on my part would injure rather than serve him."

"I am afraid it would, if, as you tell me, Lord Darminster is my son's rival, unless you appealed to his feelings."

"To his feelings!" disdainfully, "he has none."

"My dear young lady, he has been very good to my poor."

"Then he must have had some motive for it; for I must tell you that the first thing which set me against Lord Darminster was the fact that he allowed a whole family to starve at his very gates because the daughter refused to give up her lover at his bidding."

"Perhaps the lover was a bad man, and Lord Darminster knew it."

"No, the lover was a good, honest young labourer at that time and worthy of her in every way; but Lord Darminster took a fancy to the girl, who was almost a child—only sixteen—and wanted to put her to school, promising to provide for her afterwards."

"I am surprised that her parents refused," responded the Rector, innocently.

"I am not," and Greta shut her lips sternly.

"They knew quite well what he meant."

"No harm, I hope?"

"She would have been ruined body and soul if she had gone with him," answered the girl, marvelling to find she knew more of the world even than the old Rector; "but she wisely preferred poverty with the man she loved, and Lord Darminster pursued her to the death, literally."

"What do you mean?" inquired the Rector, shivering.

"He took away the father's work, casting such suspicion on him that he was unable to obtain employment elsewhere, and he died broken-hearted in the union a year later. As for the girl, she married her lover, and he took to drink."

"That couldn't have been Lord Darminster's fault, at any rate."

"The mother says it was, for he was always giving the young fellow money and drink, until he became actually demoralised, and didn't care to work. The girl was too proud to complain, but she died of starvation when her first child was born."

There was a minute's silence, which the old Rector broke by saying,—

"Poor people often take odd notions into their heads, and, therefore, it does not do to believe all they say. I am very loth to think ill of Lord Darminster, for he came forward at a time when I was needing help badly, as there were so many sick poor."

"Then I tell you he had some motive, Mr. Granville—he never did a good action in his life."

"My dear young lady, are you not prejudiced?" inquired the old Rector, mildly.

"Yes, I am," she answered, with a laugh that sounded almost fierce; "but still I am saying no more than is true. I have a feeling that all Philip's misfortunes are due to that man. There is nothing he would stop at to clear a rival out of his path."

"But even if he had had the will I do not see how he could have had the power to injure Philip. When he gave me the cheque for one hundred pounds, and Philip himself paid it into the bank, remember, so that Lord Darminster could not have altered it in the meantime."

"That is the point I cannot understand," said Greta, wearily. "If we could only show that Philip left the house at once, Mr. Granville—"

"What would that prove?"

"He could have had no chance of altering the cheque then."

"We can't prove that, unfortunately. I gave him the cheque at our early dinner, and it was nearly four o'clock before he left for the bank."

"And you did not see it in the meantime?"

"No."

"I wish you had."

"So do I; and yet it seems to me that would help us very little, for a man who intended to commit an act of this sort would easily have found the means. There is nothing easier than to evade observation when someone suspects you, and therefore you are not watched."

"I suppose so," she answered, gravely, as she lowered her face into her hands, and pondered.

"Mr. Granville," she added, presently, "will you promise me something?"

"I don't know, my dear—tell me first what it is."

"That you will let me go with you when you visit Philip in prison."

"Would your mother allow you?"

"I shall not ask her. She has no right to prevent me now, and so I would tell her, only I must be cautious and discreet for fear of injuring Philip. You will ask for an order for yourself and a lady, and let me know the time and hour that I may meet you. You can't refuse (coaxingly). Philip will think I have forsaken him if I do not go, and you would not have him think that, would you?"

"No, poor fellow!"

"Then you will tell me, Mr. Granville?"

"I am afraid there would be a difficulty," he answered, hesitatingly. "A mere stranger would not be allowed to see him, and I should have to give your name, and the relation you hold to my son."

"You would ask for the order for yourself and daughter. They will not know there that Philip is your only child, and I am your daughter now, Mr. Granville—am I not?"

"I suppose so," was the dubious reply.

"And Philip loves me!" she added, triumphantly.

"I am sure of that."

"Then why do you mind taking me with you?"

"I don't mind for myself, far the contrary; I am only thinking of you."

"And do you suppose I could think of myself when Philip is in question? I will take my chance of being found out gladly for the sake of seeing him again, and telling him that I love him just the same, and trust him all in all."

"You have a noble heart," said the old man, much moved. "I do not wonder that Philip

came to love you—imprudent as his passion was."

"Is prudence for lovers?" she asked, colouring. "Philip and I cared for each other so much we did not mind if the whole world were against us."

"Ah! foolish, happy young people," sighed the old man, remembering well how he had thought the same thing when he was wooing his sweet young love in the days gone by. "Can't you listen to our wisdom?"

"No—because it is the wisdom that comes with old age, and therefore does not suit young hearts. You were not wise, either, when you were young, for Philip has told me how you married him when you were quite a poor man, and never regretted the act."

"For a single second—"

"There!" she cried, brightly; "and yet you preach to us. Why should we regret it either?"

"Because you have been brought up to love luxury, my dear!"

"I know; but I have learnt to love Philip far better!"

"Are you very sure you will never regret your old life?" he asked, anxiously. "Philip must needs be poor and struggling for a good many years, let him work ever so hard; and you do not understand what poverty really means!"

"No, but I understand what love means!" she answered, bravely.

"And you can bear all this for his sake?"

"All this, and more!"

"If that is so, I will not come between you, my dear; and you shall go with me to see him—supposing he remains in prison!"

"Is there any hope, then, that the charge may be withdrawn, Mr. Granville?"

He shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid there is none. 'I say 'if' because I like the sound of it, that is all; but it has very little meaning to my mind, for I know that nothing can avert the trial."

"Unless the person who really did alter the cheque made full confession."

"And that is very improbable. Besides, Philip should have made objection in that case."

"Are you sure he knew the cheque was for one hundred pounds?"

"Undoubtedly. He says himself that he brought away thirty pounds from the bank."

"From money Miss Hanwell had sent him?"

"Miss Hanwell denied that she had sent him anything, you see!"

"It is very strange!" she answered, disbelievingly. "You can hardly believe she would keep up the mystery when it is injuring Philip."

"Perhaps she does not altogether understand what her silence is to him; but I will run up to town to-morrow and see her, and let you know the result by letter."

"No; don't write," she said, nervously. "I will come the next day somehow, and hear your news. Mamma would recognize your handwriting, and suspect something."

"I don't like all this deception!" Mr. Granville said, rather severely; "but I suppose it can't be helped at this moment. Directly it is possible to speak, I shall go myself to Lady Avanley and tell her the whole truth."

"I ask nothing better!" Greta replied.

"You can't think how I long sometimes to shout out my secret so that everyone may hear, for I am so tired of the daily burden!"

"You must be. I only wonder you ever had the courage to take it up!"

"I wonder I had; but I loved Philip so dearly, you see!"

This was a plea that could not fail to touch Philip's father, and though he still disapproved, he entered no further reproach.

"You had better go home," he said, gently; "or Lady Avanley will miss you, and prevent your coming again to hear about Philip. I will accompany you to your door."

"Oh, no! I can quite well go alone," she urged; but Mr. Granville would not allow this,

and escorted her back to the Dower House, waiting at the gate until he saw the door open, throwing a momentary gleam of brightness on the outer greyness, and then close on her slender figure.

Lady Avanley was in her room dressing for dinner when Greta returned, and the girl did not know whether she had missed her or not; for she made no remark upon her sudden disappearance during the evening.

But whenever Greta lifted her eyes suddenly, she arrested a furtive glance that was travelling her way, and understood that for all her assumed indifference Lady Avanley was, beyond measure, curious as to the effect of her communication concerning Philip Granville.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DOWER HOUSE had not been much of a home to Alice, and yet, as she drove away in the darkness, there was a feeling of utter despair and desolation in her heart.

She had not the least idea where to go, or what to do, and left chance to decide her fate.

"I will go to the station," she told herself, "and the first person who takes his or her ticket after I arrive shall be my guide."

For want of a better inspiration, she accepted this, and having seen her luggage taken on to the platform and paid for the ticket, she followed a dyspeptic-looking woman, whom the omnibus from a neighbouring town had just set down, up to the ticket-office, and hearing her ask for a "third single to London," timidly put down a sovereign and made the same demand.

The dyspeptic-looking woman was still on the platform, when Alice had seen her boxes labelled, and when the train drew up presently the girl followed her into an empty carriage and sat herself down in an opposite corner with her veil over her face.

For a good half-hour there was absolute silence between them, and plunged in a sombre reverie, Alice was, glad presently to have it broken by the other's asking if she were going to London.

"Yes, I am going to London," she answered, rousing with a start.

"Oh! indeed. You live there, I suppose?"

Alice smiled bitterly.

"I live nowhere, just now."

"Bless me, how odd! Most people have a home of some sort."

"In a whole city full home she had none," quoted Alice with pathetic gravity. "One has heard of such things before!"

"I never have," enunciated her companion decidedly. "All my friends are well-to-do."

"So are mine—but that doesn't help me."

"Are you too proud to beg, then?"

"Yes, but not too proud to work."

"Oh!" and the dyspeptic-looking woman relapsed into reflective silence.

Presently she resumed the conversation by saying—

"What can you do now? Not much, I'll be bound; your hands have never been soiled, that is plain to see!"

"I never thought of trusting to my hands."

"To what, then?"

"To my head. I have been well educated, and ought to be able to teach."

The woman gave another of her unpleasant little grunts, which might have meant nothing, but which certainly suggested incredulity.

"I'd rather keep a grocer's shop," she said at last; "there's more profit in that, and less labour."

"Possibly; but you see I am not accustomed to that sort of thing."

"Oh! if you're high and mighty, you won't get on, of course," and the other took no more notice of her for half-an-hour at least. But having consumed her last sandwich, and drained the last drop of stimulant from her flask, silence became irksome, and she returned to her questions.

Alice would not have answered them, only

that presently it transpired that the woman, who gave her name as Faith, had longings to let, and then the girl found herself wondering if this had been put in her way on purpose, and asked eagerly if they were dear.

"La bless you! No, as cheap as dirt," Mrs. Faith returned. "I've a little back parlour with bedroom above as would suit you to a T, and only fifteen shillings a week for both—no extras, but kitchen-fire, washing, housecleaning, and just a shilling for attendance to encourage the maid."

Alice's instinct had warned her against this woman from the first, but in her utter loneliness and ignorance she grasped at this offer, as if it had been all she could desire. Anyhow, it was a resting-place for the moment—somewhere to go—and she hoped she might be able to obtain a situation ere long in some respectable family, where she would have the shelter her youth and inexperience required.

In the meantime, she quickly decided she would only take Mrs. Faith's best parlour, but by the week, so that she might be able to leave in a few days supposing she procured employment, or found it expedient to make a change. Mrs. Faith seemed delighted at having done a good stroke of business whilst taking her pleasure, and said at once—

"My lodgers always pay in advance. It saves a lot of trouble, you see, and makes one's mind easy. I don't know you, and you don't know me, but so long as there are no accounts between us that doesn't matter."

Alice took out her purse, and asked what the exact amount would be.

"Fifteen shillings for the room, one shilling for the maid, eightpence for kitchen fire—that makes seventeen and sixpence, please; the other item we can leave until the end of the week."

There was a greedy glitter in Mrs. Faith's eye as she pocketed the coin, which increased Alice's prejudice against her; but she was committed now, and could not draw back even if she wished; and she was not sure she did wish, for homelessness was worse than anything besides.

When they reached London Mrs. Faith suggested she should show Alice the way to her house.

"You must have a cab with all that luggage," she said; "and you won't pay any more for me."

Alice did not quite relish her company, but it would not have done to offend her in the circumstances, and so she conquered her qualms, and allowed the other to take a seat by her side.

For a full hour they jogged on slowly, and she was weary in body, as well as sick at heart, when at last the cab stopped, and Mrs. Faith said, with animation—

"Here we are. And there's my husband at the door. After all, there's no place like home!"

Alice took one glance at the dingy little house as seen by the light of a flickering gas-lamp blurred by a drizzling rain, and thought there was no accounting for taste.

Such a home as this could have had no charms for her.

Mrs. Faith bustled out, calling lustily for "Mary Ann," the maid, who had to be encouraged by the weekly donation of one shilling from each lodger, and who looked as if this might be the only wage she received, and ushered Alice into a poor, little room at the back of the house, saying cheerfully—

"It doesn't look comfortable this cold night, but Mary Ann shall light you a fire and get you some tea, and you'll soon feel quite at home!"

At home! Here! Impossible! the girl told herself with the tears struggling to her eyes.

Everything was so shabby and dirty; and though she might never have known great luxury since her father's death, she had always had refined surroundings.

The dusty horse-hair couch, the faded chairs, the sordid appointments, generally, filled her



[DRIVEN FORTH UPON THE WORLD.]

with impatient repulsion, and, in spite of herself, she sat down and had a good cry.

But Mary's reappearance with a sisterful of hot coals stayed her tears, for pride's sake, and when she had taken some tea her spirits rose a little.

There was just this ray of hope through the gloom of her future—that Sir Charles might be able to reinstate himself in her good opinion.

It was a forlorn hope, perhaps, but it was better than none at all, and she hugged it passionately to her heart.

But when she fell asleep later in her hard bed, in a miserable attic, it was to dream that the black-eyed Anita bent over her to whisper,—

"I love him more than you know how to love, and he belongs to me. Dispute my power if you dare!"

She awoke, shuddering and weeping, to see a star shining through the lattice-window, and it seemed to her this star had the tender light she had seen in her mother's eyes.

"She is watching over me up there, and no harm can befall me," Alice said to herself, and composed herself to sleep again peacefully with a prayer on her lips.

It was terrible to awake in the morning to all the miserable realities of the present, but Alice would not think, and hurried her dressing and went down.

The fire in the back parlour had only just been lighted and smoked deplorably, and somehow the room looked more bare and wretched than the night before, because the daylight showed up its deficiencies more plainly.

"That cloth is not clean," observed Alice, pointing to the dingy table; "I could not eat my breakfast off that."

"It's only been used twice, miss," answered Mary Ann, rather sulkily.

"And that's twice too often. Tell Mrs. Faith I should like to have another."

The girl went off reluctantly, and Alice

could hear a good deal of grumbling below; but she gained her end, and made them understand at starting that she meant to be treated with proper consideration and respect.

Directly she had swallowed her breakfast she put on her things and went off to begin her weary search after employment. She put her name down at several agents, paying in some instances a shilling, and others half-a-crown, and having ordered no meal at her lodgings for economy's sake, she dined off two penny buns and a glass of water.

When she got back to her lodgings at dusk she wrote along letter to Miss Middleton, telling her of all her troubles, and saying she was going to give her as a reference in case she obtained a situation, and went out to post it herself, not feeling as if Mary Ann were to be trusted.

The evening that followed was, beyond expression, dreary and depressing. She was tired with her long tramp through the dirty streets—and discouraged besides, as young people are apt to be when the thing they desire does not come at once for the asking.

She had been counting her money too, and she saw that it could not last out even two weeks. And when it was gone what was to become of her? She would rather die of starvation than appeal to Lady Avanley for help, and besides a few Indian ornaments, she had nothing she could sell.

She had not the heart to take a book, but sat listlessly over the fire, watching the red coals, and tracing familiar faces in the flame, until the last spark died out, and then she came back to herself, shivering, and went up to bed.

The next day, and the next, and the one after that, Alice continued her weary search. Sometimes she had a little hope, as she was sent to see some lady by the agents, or answered an advertisement in person; but there was always some objection she found, the princi-

pal one being that her reference was abroad, and could not, therefore, be seen.

She lived scantily enough all this time—making her dinner always off buns—her only luxury being an egg in the morning to help her through her day's work; and yet the money dwindled and dwindled, and when she had paid her second week's lodging in advance she had only seven shillings left in her purse.

That evening she brought down her ornaments and looked them over to see which she could best spare. All of them were presents, and dear to her for the sake of their donors and the associations connected with them, but she must have food.

Already she was beginning to feel strangely weak at times; and if she were to fall ill she knew quite well Mrs. Faith would wash her hands of her as quickly as possible. She must live a little more generously, and keep up her strength, she decided; and so the next day she stole like a thief into a jeweller's shop and sold a bracelet; and with a small part of the proceeds she bought the first meat meal she had tasted since she left the Dower House eight days before.

(To be continued.)

Two persons who have chosen each other out of all the species, with a design to be each other's comfort and entertainment, have in that action bound themselves to be good-humoured, affable, discreet, forbearing, patient and joyful, with respect to each other's frailties and perfections, to the end of their lives.

SOUTH BELORAVIA is becoming very Belgravian. A large number of titles now grace that neighbourhood according to the Directory, and the determination of the Duke of Westminster to so perfect that part of his property that it should become the fashion, has resulted in its being the chosen quarter of many of the noblesse. The continuous rows of good residences and open streets mark where people of income have their abode.



[THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.]

NOVELETTE.]

THE SUN THAT NEVER SETS.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUN was just rising, casting a flood of rosy light over the flat roof and square-paned windows of Thanet House. It was buried amidst tall firs, chestnuts, and giant, wide-spreading oaks, deep down in a natural hollow, and the sound of busy life beyond the hill which towered above was borne to its inmates in a dreamy hum, mellowed by distance.

A tall, slight girl with heavy brown curls tied with narrow black ribbon was standing on the lawn, a look of eager expectation on her fair, oval face. Presently the sharp crushing of footsteps on the gravel path fell upon her ear, and a bright flush stained even the snowy brow.

She moved quickly forward, the long train of her soft black robe making no sound on the damp grass, and in another moment her white hands were clasped in two strong brown ones, and two dark eyes were gazing into hers—blue as the sky above their heads.

"Uncle is asleep, and I crept down like a mouse for fear of waking him," said the girl, in a hushed voice, as though she was afraid she would be heard even at that distance from the large, brown-brick building.

"Yes, I know; fast asleep as a house. I woke auntie as I passed, and she has promised to be in the garden when we come back. But where is your hat, Cora?"

"Oh! that is all right. I put it in the summer-house with my shawl last night. Come with me to fetch them, you lazy boy!" for the young fellow had thrown himself on to a garden-seat, but he rose instantly at her words, and they walked side by side down the quaint old pathway where tall lilies nodded in the cool, fresh air, and the sweet fragrance of summer flowers fanned their cheeks.

They stood still for a few moments at the entrance to the summer-house, while Leonard Denbigh plucked a bunch of the star-like jasmine that hung in graceful festoons over the delicate woodwork; then Cora disappeared for a moment, returning with a soft cashmere shawl over her shapely shoulders and a coquettish little hat adorned with several fluffy black feathers on her head.

"Now, Cora, for a good brisk walk across the fields," and taking her hand he placed it on his arm, and opening a tiny gate in the wall they passed out into a broad avenue of red and white chestnuts.

The ground was strewn with the rich bloom now, for the small pale husks of the nuts were already formed on their high branches.

"This will be our last morning walk together!" said Cora.

They had left the avenue far behind, and were walking slowly across some fields where the tall grass waved and rippled in the morning breeze, and the odour of wild roses filled the air.

"Pick me a bunch of those roses, Len? Perhaps they will serve as a keepsake, who knows?"

"Why should this be our last walk together?" asked Leonard, as he mounted a rustic stile and commenced plucking the pale blossoms from their prickly stems.

"Because Agnes will be here to-day, and I should not like to run any risks. Besides, she is to sleep in my room, so you see it will be impossible."

Cora took the bunch of roses he held out and turned her head so that he might not see her face. How silly he would think her if he were to see those tears.

"Darling!" whispered her cousin, jumping from the stile and putting his arm round the slim waist. "Darling! I shall hate this Agnes Lester if she is going to interfere with us. Why could she not have a room of her own?" and a dark frown disfigured his handsome face as he continued, kicking some stones from the

pathway into the deep ditch that ran along the hedge, "I believe it is done on purpose. What say you, Cora mine?"

"I think, Leonard, that we are both very stupid. We see each other every day and ought to be satisfied. And, Len, you must not talk of hating Agnes—poor Agnes! She has no one in the whole world to care for her now that Aunt Muriel is dead but ourselves, and I mean to do all I can to make her happy."

Leonard did not make any reply, and they silently turned in the direction of home. As they reached the brow of the hill the clock in the parish church chimed the hour of eight, and the two quickened their pace.

A slight, small old lady was walking slowly down the well-kept pathway gathering flowers, which she placed in a fancy basket she held in her hand, when the cousins entered the great wooden gate. She raised her head as their footsteps sounded on the crisp gravel and looked with a smile at their bright, happy young faces.

"What a pity it is that Tom will not allow them to be engaged. I cannot understand that absurd prejudice against cousins marrying," she murmured to herself.

Tom was her brother and Cora's uncle. Cora's father and mother were drowned on their way to England after years spent in South Africa, and Thomas Denbigh had taken the little waif and brought her up with his only child—a son.

He never thought that in the days to come these two might grow to love each other with a deeper, if not purer, love than that a brother feels for a sister; and when this did come to pass he stormed and raved, and finally threatened, in private to his sister—his wife had been dead some years—that he would turn the ungrateful little minx out of doors; but by dint of gentle persuasion Tom Denbigh cooled down, and the house settled back into its old calm.

On the morrow morning, when they were to drive over to the station for Agnes, Leonard took the opportunity to call Cora aside when they were alone.

"What is it, Len?" said Cora.

"Cora!" he whispered, taking the girl's supple form in his arms, and holding her to him passionately, while he pressed quick, warm kisses on the fair face. "Cora, you will not let this girl come between us! We have been all in all to each other ever since I can remember! Spare me a little of your time still. I know that we must be careful, or my father will go off into one of his fits of temper, and for your sake I bear with this secrecy!"

His cousin gazed at him with surprised agitation. She could not understand this sudden outburst of passion. Why should Agnes Lester make her forget him?

"You know, Leonard, that my love is given to you for all time, therefore why ask this question? You are unkind and unreasonable!"

There were tears in the deep blue eyes, and the sweet mouth quivered. How could he be so cruel as to even hint at such a thing as their parting?

"My darling, I know I am," he replied, still holding her in that close embrace; and she trembled beneath the gaze of his dark eyes. "But, dear, if you knew the strange foreboding that fills my soul, you would not be so hard. I feel as though it would have been better for you if we had never met!"

"Leonard!" she breathed, in a low, husky tone, the pink colour fading from her cheeks. "I did not mean it, dear—oh, forgive me! I must be going mad to speak so wildly!" cried Leonard, gathering the trembling Agnes close to his heart, and kissing the sweet, pale face till the deep colour dyed cheek and brow.

"Really, Len, I must go up and put my hat and jacket on. We shall be too late!" said Cora, some few minutes later. "And, mind, no more nonsense!"

She ran out of the room with a bright smile on her face, and a happy light dancing in her large blue eyes, humming as she went the first few bars of the pretty Scotch ballad, "Dinna Forget."

Judith Denbigh and her niece appeared, in about a quarter-of-an-hour, ready dressed for their drive.

The station was some five miles distant, and the carriage did not take long to do the journey; and Cora was walking up and down the wooden platform, her blue eyes shining with expectation, and a flush on her fair cheeks.

CHAPTER II.

LEONARD had gone to the ticket-office to inquire how long the train would be; and Aunt Judith was admiring the flowers that grew on the high banks on either side.

Great red and white roses were just opening, and the humbler summer flowers were filling the cool air with their fragrance.

The train was punctual enough, and soon rumbled slowly into the station; a cloud of white steam completely hiding, for a second, the passengers as they alighted.

Cora stared eagerly at the carriage doors, as they opened and the people descended one after the other. By this time the platform was crowded—for though the station was out of the way, the town was rather an important one, and there was a great deal of traffic to-and-fro—but no young girl who could possibly be her cousin had appeared yet; and Cora began to fear that Agnes had missed the train.

"That must be she!" cried Judith Denbigh, suddenly pointing with her parasol to the far end of the platform.

Cora and Leonard turned with one accord, and saw coming towards them, with slow, stately grace, a tall, fair girl, with a wealth of deep gold hair, and a complexion that the searching glare of the noonday sun could find no flaw in.

As she moved along with that easy, languid tread, the soft, black travelling-robe revealed every line of the splendidly-proportioned

figure; and a swift, sharp pang shot through Cora's heart, as she saw the look of startled admiration in Leonard's dark eyes when this vision of perfect beauty stood before him, but she quickly repressed the feeling.

"How could he help admiring Agnes Lester?" she asked herself, for she had never seen so lovely a face before.

"You are my Aunt Judith, I know!" said the girl, in a low, thrilling voice, lifting her snowy lids with their thick fringes of gold, and holding out a small, black-gloved hand.

Judith took the slim fingers in her own warm clasp; but a strange misty assailed her loving heart as she caught the glance those pale blue eyes darted under their long lashes, at her nephew Leonard.

"She is very like her father in expression," she thought. "I hope and trust, for dear Cora's sake, that she is not like him in disposition," and she sighed, for she felt that the dear old days of quiet, peaceful happiness had come to an end with the advent of this beautiful creature, around whom an atmosphere of fashion seemed to hover. "I knew you in a moment, Agnes," she said aloud, kissing the soft-skinned cheek. "You are like your father; but you have your mother's complexion." She spoke pleasantly; she would try to love the orphan daughter of her only sister.

The roseate colour deepened on the rounded cheek, as Agnes kissed the pure, calm face of her cousin Cora, and then turned to Leonard, a bewildering smile parting the thin, scarlet lips. The girl's soulless heart craved for and lived upon adulation and flattery, and Judith Denbigh, though she knew it not, had completely won her niece's heart by these simple words of praise.

"Now, anatie, you three had better go over to the hotel while I see to Agnes's luggage," said Leonard. "I shall not be more than a few minutes."

Agnes looked after his strong, stalwart figure, as he strode in the direction of the cloak-room, and Miss Denbigh sighed again, for she had lived long enough in the world to read aright the smile that lurked at the corner of the girl's red mouth.

"She is a flirt," she thought.

"Come, Agnes," and Cora slipped her hand through the other's arm, and led her across the broad, quiet road, with its grim, old-fashioned houses standing back from the highway, half hidden by thick, wide-spreading trees, that were now in their fullest leaf.

The hotel, a great stone building, with three rows of glistening windows draped in the snowiest of muslin and palest of pink, faced the railway station. A broad flight of steps led up to the immense hall, where several gentlemen were smoking, lazily watching the people streaming out of the station as train after train came in. They turned and stared with well-bred admiration at the two girls as they entered the large, cool hall—one tall, slight, and spiritually lovely, the other tall and fair, with a beauty that men rave about.

After luncheon they drove back. Cora never forgot that drive home through the long narrow lanes, bordered by high, green hedges, where the birds were hopping in and out and carolling gaily; then along broad country roads, where green fields and patches of wooded land stretched far, far away. Presently they came to a road across which the long branches of the high trees met in a pale emerald arch, and every now and again, as the landau rolled swiftly on, little brown squirrels ran across this natural archway, and gazed curiously down at the intruders. It was all new to Agnes—the fresh country scene and the soft chirruping of the birds above their heads—and she kept Leonard employed in answering all her questions.

"We have not far to go now, dear Agnes," said Cora, bending forward and laying her black-gloved hand on her cousin's slim wrist; "and I am sure you will need a rest before dinner."

"Oh, I am not tired in the least degree," responded Agnes, languidly, lifting her white

lids and flashing a sweet look at her cousin's fair face. "I am accustomed to travelling. You see, poor dear mamma was never able to stay in one place for any length of time during the last two or three years, and Grandma Gordon's legacy just enabled her to have the change she so much required."

The soft, seductive tones had grown so low and languid, that it was only by bending over her that they heard her words, and Leonard turned his dark head away and gazed down the avenue through which they were now driving, a mist of unspoken sympathy dimming his eyes. Poor Agnes! her life had indeed been hard, sad, to a certain extent, and long.

"Here we are!" cried Judith Denbigh, as the carriage drew up before the brown wooden gates of Thanet House.

Leonard sprang down on to the path and helped the two cousins and his aunt to alight, and then opened the gate for them to enter.

Mr. Thomas Denbigh was standing in the long, somewhat dark dining-room, reading the paper when the sound of wheels disturbed him, and a flush of pleased expectation rose to his rugged face.

"Ah! so they have arrived," he muttered, going to the window and drawing the heavy red curtains aside with a hand that trembled slightly—for, spite his hardness, he had loved his dead sister, and the thought of seeing her child stirred a chord in his heart he had deemed long since snapped.

The sight that met his eyes was one well calculated to inspire a feeling of pleasure, but Tom Denbigh drew back with a hasty exclamation, and a dark cloud of disappointment overspread his stern features.

Agnes Lester was walking by Leonard's side, her fair, haughty head turned towards him, a smile of intense interest lighting the pale blue eyes and playing over the perfect features; but the gentle swaying of the tall, voluptuous form as she advanced along the soft, yielding grass somehow reminded him of the sinuous movement of a snake. His new niece was so different to what he had pictured her. It would be simply impossible to pet this splendid woman.

These thoughts chased each other through his mind as he hastened to the hall door, and throwing it open went out into the jasmine-covered porch to meet them.

"Hullo, pater!" exclaimed Leonard, with a smile. "Here is our fair cousin."

"Welcome to Thanet House," said his father, drawing Agnes to him, and pressing a kiss on her fairly cheek. "You are like—"

He checked himself abruptly; not even now, though the grass was green on his grave, could he bring himself to mention the name of the man who had ruined his sister's life.

The girl made no answer, but she took his two hands in hers and pressed them; then Miss Denbigh carried her off to her room, followed by Cora.

"She is the most perfectly lovely woman I have ever seen!" cried Leonard, enthusiastically, as the door closed behind them—they had entered the dining-room while they were speaking their words of welcome.

"My boy, take care," replied Thomas Denbigh; and somehow a curious feeling of jealousy for his pet, Cora, crept into his heart, despite his assertion that he would never countenance their marriage. "Remember, she, also, is your cousin."

Leonard made no immediate answer. He stood gazing out into the garden, over which a faint haze was hovering, hiding the sweet, pale flowers behind a fairy veil, thinking of the haughty, yet gracious, Agnes. No thought of love had as yet entered his mind with regard to his lovely cousin, and so his father's words fell upon unheeding ears; but her beauty had made an impression upon him, and his next words showed the drift of his imaginings.

"Do you not think, father, that we ought to have a little company to cheer Agnes up a bit? We have got into awfully quiet habits of late," he said.

"You forget her recent loss, my boy!" and Tom Denbigh's voice broke as he thought of the quiet grave in that far-away country cemetery, where all that remained of his dearly-loved sister was laid.

"Indeed, I do not!" cried Leonard, putting his hand on his father's shoulder in silent sympathy; "but I did not mean a dance, or croquet party, or anything of that sort; I merely meant that I was afraid it would be dull for her here."

"Well, we will see about it. I suppose she will not be content with the companionship of her crochety uncle and simple little Aunt Judith, like my Cora," said he, sighed.

"Do come, even if indeed cast their shadows before? If not, why had three out of the four who resided at Thonet House sighed, unconsciously, at the thought of Agnes Lester's visit?"

The evening was a quiet, pleasant one, Agnes doing all in her power to ingratiate herself with her uncle. But though he liked her better as the night wore on, and she talked in that low, sweet voice of her dead mother, he felt that the loving tenderness that filled his heart when he thought of Cora, would never live there for Agnes.

Cora played several of her uncle's favourite songs when they went to the drawing-room after dinner. She was a splendid player, and there was power and pathos in the rich tones of her strong young voice, as she sang that exquisite song, "Only a dream."

"Your singing is perfect, Cora," whispered Agnes, as she kissed her "good-night" ere closing her eyes in sleep; but in her heart she was jealous of this beautiful girl, for she had found a rival at last; she felt convinced.

CHAPTER III.

"Where are you going, Cora?" the soft, sweet, surprised tones startled Cora, as she stood before the glass fastening the buttons of her outdoor jacket, and she flushed a rosy pink to the roots of her gold-brown hair.

Agnes Lester had been at Thonet House more than a month when Leonard begged Cora to steal out for one of their old morning walks, and she, after a great deal of coaxing and persuasion, consented.

She rose just as the first golden shades of early morning tinged the Eastern sky and the birds began to chirp in the broad oaks outside her bedroom window, and, moving softly about the room, was soon dressed; but even as she was congratulating herself upon the fact that Agnes was still sleeping, those words of inquiry fell upon her ears.

"I am going for a walk across the fields with Leonard," she replied, quickly, as she placed her velvet hat on her graceful head.

"Will you come?"

"Yes, there is nothing I should like better!" cried Agnes, going to the window and drawing the lace curtains aside. "Why, the sun is only just rising. Is it not a glorious sight?"

Cora did not make any answer, for Agnes was gazing at her own reflection in the glass when she finished the sentence.

"Make haste, Agnes!" she said, presently, "Leonard will think I am not coming; besides, all the beauty of the morning will be gone."

"Nothing does a man so much good as a lesson in patience," smiled Agnes, as she slowly commenced coiling her rich masses of dead-gold hair around her head, while Cora stood gazing in genuine admiration at the lovely face and perfect apraised arms and splendid figure of this hitherto unknown cousin.

"Were all the women as lovely in that fashionable world to which Agnes belonged?" she asked herself, never dreaming in the sweet unconsciousness that she possessed a face over which an artist would dream, and a form as lithely beautiful as the Greek maidens of old.

As they opened the front door and stepped out on to the crisp gravel path, a flood of

rosy light fell upon them, brightening their sombre dresses and lending a faint colour to the pure, calm face of Cora Denbigh.

It would have been difficult to decide which was the lovelier—the tall fair, woman with the cold blue eyes and wealth of dead-gold hair and voluptuously perfect figure, or the slight, willowy girl with the rich heavy curls falling below her slender waist framing the sweet pale features that were lit by tender, dark blue eyes? And Leonard, coming across the smooth green lawn to greet them, felt a thrill of pleasure sweep through him as he gazed upon the picture.

"I did not know we were to be honoured by your presence, *ma belle cousine*!" he said, smiling.

"Well, neither did I!" she responded, airily, "until I awoke this morning and saw Cora ready dressed; and when she told me that you were going for a ramble across the fields. I could not resist."

An uneasy feeling crept into Cora's heart as she saw the light that leaped into Leonard's dark eyes as Agnes spoke. The words were simple enough in themselves, but, somehow, spoken in that silky, insinuating voice, they seemed to have a hidden meaning, and both Cora and Leonard felt this.

"Come, Leonard, we shall not have much time for our walk," said Cora, in her usual tones, placing her hand on his arm. But he did not heed her gentle touch. He was bending over Agnes, who was saying something in a low voice about 'the sunrise' and 'dear mamma,' so she walked on by their side in perfect silence.

They took the same road that she and Leonard had traversed one short month back—but the world had changed since then.

The leaves were beginning to fall, and a rosbrown tinged those that were left on the trees, and the sweet flowers that had perfumed the air had already commenced to fade, giving place to the gaudy, unscented blossoms of early autumn.

Leonard, too, had changed, and a pained look dimmed Cora's dark blue eyes, as she thought of his words: "Do not let this Agnes Lester come between us." It had not been her fault, but assuredly this had come to pass! And she felt, as she glanced at the two walking along in the dreamy haze of the September morning, that Leonard had only asked her to come for this walk from companionship—not love—and the thought sent a proud flush to the beautiful face.

"Are you enjoying your walk, Cora?" asked Leonard, as the three passed under the shade of some old trees near the road.

"Of course I am. How could it possibly be otherwise?" she replied calmly, but there was a ring of sarcasm in the sweet voice, and the perfect lips were curved in a haughty smile; still the answer was the only one Leonard could have expected, and Leonard had to be content, though he had an uncomfortable sensation of being snubbed.

The three cousins lingered in the pleasant morning air, gazing at this view from some grassy eminence, and at that house enshroued in leathery larches and tall nodding firs, until the mist had cleared away and the sun shone in deep yellow patches over field, river, and heath. Then Leonard took out his watch and exclaimed that it was past nine, and that pater would be in a temper if they did not hurry home.

But Agnes never hurried herself, no matter what was happening, so they had to suit their pace to hers, and as the clock struck the half-hour they entered the old-fashioned gate, and passed up the pathway to the long French window, where Aunt Judith was standing, a look of good-tempered impatience on her small, pleasant features.

"Here they are at last," she cried, stepping out on to the stone balcony and kissing the two girls. "Why, what a colour you have, Cora! Your walk has done you good."

Leonard turned and gazed into the fair girlish face, but the quiet, haughty glance she

favoured him with did not please him—for although he admired her cousin's superb loveliness he was still jealous of Cora's love.

Tom Denbigh was standing at the window, as he had stood four weeks back, but on this occasion there was no impatience in his tones as he greeted his son and niece.

"Good-morning, uncle!" said Cora, tangling her slim fingers in his beard and gazing affectionately into his face. "Is there any news of importance to impart to us that you stand there while breakfast waits?" she added with a smile, pointing to an open letter which he held in his hand.

"Well, yet, you have guessed right. Uncle Jasper is coming down to see us in a few days, and he has written to apprise me of the fact. It is just like him, he never likes to come upon us unawares. Now mind, Leonard, you are civil to him; remember, you are his heir."

This was said with a laugh, for Tom Denbigh was the last person in the world to really entertain such ideas, and he had brought "his boy" up with very simple tastes. Moreover, he was deeply attached to this his only brother, the last of five stalwart, honourable men—three of whom had lost their lives in the service of their country.

"Oh, we shall make him welcome enough for his own sake, never fear!" laughed Leonard, in a pleased voice. (Uncle Jasper was a favourite with them all.) "What say you, Cora?"

"Next to Aunt Judith and Uncle Tom, I love him," said Cora, in the grave tones she always spoke in when affected in any way. Leonard glanced quickly at her to see if there was any malice preposse in this remark, but she had turned to Judith Denbigh, and was speaking in an undertone to her.

"The deuce she does!" he muttered. "Then, I suppose, I come last," and the thought piqued his vanity so much that he paid his cousin Cora more than usual attention at breakfast that morning.

Agnes Lester's rose-lust complexion appeared as she listened to the foregoing conversation, and the expression of those cold blue eyes would have surprised Leonard could he only have seen it, but she kept them studiously fixed upon her plate for some time, and when she raised the large white lids the eyes had regained their usual look.

"Uncle Jasper!" she then said. "I have heard dear mamma speak of him, but she loved you best, Uncle Tom."

"Yes, I was her favourite brother," he replied, in rather a husky voice. Then, as if to change the subject: "You had better get Jasper's old crib, the bedroom, ready; and, oh! I forgot to say, that George is coming too. But I leave all the arrangement to you, Judith. You will manage to have a room fit for him to sleep in by the time they arrive, I dare say. Now I must be off."

George was Sir Jasper's secretary and protégé. Sir Jasper had never married, and George Newcombe, the orphan child of a dear friend, had become to him as a beloved son; and as he grew to manhood he decided that he could not part with him, and so, dismissing his secretary, he delegated George to his duties. This was done to render the young fellow independent—for, of course, he paid him a handsome salary.

Twelve o'clock had just struck on the following day when the two girls, who were standing at the breakfast-room window, heard the sound of carriage wheels, and in a few moments the heavy wooden gate was thrown open and the brougham bowed up the well-kept carriage drive. Leonard was the first to alight, and he turned and held out his hand to his uncle, who pushed him aside, saying laughingly,—

"No, my boy, I am not feeble enough for that yet."

"Just as hearty as ever—eh, Jasper?" cried Tom Denbigh, as he clasped his brother's hand, his grey eyes growing dim with emotion. Sir Jasper Denbigh was a little above the middle height, stout, and well-built. His face was a striking one; the broad, high forehead

gave an expression of nobility to the kindly countenance, bronzed by constant travelling, which the snowy hair, waving back from the temples, only served to enhance. He wore no beard, only a small, well-kept moustache. But the eyes told the character of the man—keen, piercing, hazel eyes that, as they glanced at the two beautiful girls standing before him, seemed to read every thought that was passing in their minds.

But there was yet another visitor—George Newcombe, the secretary. He was standing in the pathway conversing with Leonard, who had sent the carriage round to the stables, when, after the first joyous greetings were over, Sir Jasper turned to introduce him. He was a tall, slenderly-built young fellow, with crisp, black hair, a pale, aristocratic face, great, gleaming dark eyes, and a thin, red mouth, half concealed by a small black moustache; the nose was a peculiarly-shaped one, curving like the beak of a vulture, and gave a sinister, cunning look to the otherwise extremely handsome face.

"This is my adopted son, George Newcombe," said Sir Jasper, laying his hand affectionately on the young fellow's arm.

"I suppose we must call him George, uncle, or he will be jealous of Leonard," observes Agnes, smiling graciously, as she held out a slim, white hand.

"Just imagine, 'Mr Newcombe,' hand me the salt, please," cried Sir Jasper, and he gave a hearty laugh, in which they all joined, as Tom Denbigh linked his arm in his brother's and led the way to the dining-room, where a lunch of unusual splendour was laid in honour of their guests.

That was a happy meal. How they all laughed and talked! Sir Jasper relating anecdotes of things that had occurred while over in India, turning now and then to George to say—

"Now, George, you give your version of this incident," then breaking out into a hearty laugh before the story was half finished.

Cora forgot her love troubles in the pleasure of seeing her uncle again. It was six years since he had visited England, and there was much to be told on both sides. Even Agnes awoke from her habitual languor and conversed animatedly with George Newcombe. Leonard was half inclined to be sulky at this, but he thought better of it, and joined in the general conversation.

It was not difficult for the most unobservant person to see that before day faded into night George Newcombe had succumbed to the charms of the beautiful, fascinating Agnes Lester. Here was a face to take men by storm, and, being a finished coquette, she knew well how to throw a tender light into those cold, blue eyes. She loved Leonard, but he had not declared himself, and so when George led her to the piano and bent over her while he selected his favourite songs, she amused herself by returning his looks of admiration by tender upward glances, drooping her golden lashes on to her peach-like cheek when he whispered some compliment into her dainty ear.

After a time Sir Jasper crossed the room to where Cora was sitting, in the shadow of the heavy curtains, gazing out into the moonlit grounds, and asked if she was not going to sing to her old uncle, who longed to hear his birdie's voice again.

"Do you remember the night you went away, Jasper?" said Miss Denbigh, laying her hand on her brother's. "Cora was scarcely more than a child then, but she sang beautifully. What was the last song? I know that there were tears in all our eyes when she finished."

"My native land, good-night!" replied Cora. "Shall I sing that, uncle?" and she rose with easy, unaffected grace, and a bright, sweet smile on her fair face.

"Yes, dear, I should like to hear it again."

Leonard drew back from his position near the piano as Sir Jasper and Cora approached; and as his eyes met her calm, quiet orbs, he flushed, and, coming forward, offered to

turn the music. But Sir Jasper waved him back with a laugh.

"Uncle never would let anyone turn my music, even when I was a child," she said, softly; then, striking a few chords, she commenced.

Agnes, who had taken a seat at a small table near one of the windows—George, of course, following—gave a start as the clear, strong voice rang through the room.

"What a magnificent voice!" exclaimed George, in hushed tones; and he turned and gazed at the singer.

He had not bestowed more than a passing glance upon her before, but now, as he looked upon her, he was surprised to see how lovely she was. Agnes, reading his thoughts, was piqued, and resolved to enslave him. It would be good fun, she decided.

CHAPTER IV.

THE bells were ringing out joyously—peal after peal came softly, but distinctly, across the snow-clad country. No sound could be heard for miles save the merry joy bells ringing in the New Year.

At the open door of Thanet House, from whence the light flooded forth a golden stream on the glistening snow, stood Sir Jasper, his brother, and Miss Denbigh, silent but happy, with hand clasped in hand.

Presently Cora and Agnes joined the group, Leonard and George soon following.

"A happy New Year to you all!" said Cora, slipping one hand through Sir Jasper's arm, and laying the other on Tom Denbigh's shoulder. "Aunt Judith, kiss me, I have no more hands."

And Miss Denbigh bent forward and pressed a long, loving kiss on the gentle, lovely face.

"Shall we walk round the house and listen to the bells from Hatherly?" suggested Leonard.

"By all means," replied his father; "but we old fogies will remain where it is warm."

"I say, old boy, speak for yourself," cried Sir Jasper, giving him a hearty slap on the back. "I never intend to get old, but, nevertheless, I shall stay where I am."

Cora had long ago given Leonard to understand that she wished their engagement at an end; and so when, on that January night, four months after Agnes Lester's arrival, the four young people sauntered out into the crisp snow-covered garden, Cora lingered behind, leaving Leonard and her cousin to go on alone.

There was a large conservatory at the south side of Thanet House with a flight of stone steps leading to a balcony outside, and towards this spot Cora and George bent their steps.

"The moon will come out from behind that bank of clouds presently, and we shall be able to see the church," he observed.

He loved Agnes with a mad, passionate love, that would stop at nothing to gain possession of the object of his passion, but there was something about the stately winning grace of Cora's manner that inspired him with a feeling of unworthiness whenever he was in her presence.

If ever George experienced a pure feeling for any woman that woman was Cora Denbigh, with her large calm eyes lit by the pure holy soul within—eyes that had often unconsciously stilled by a glance the tumult of passion that rose in his heart when Leonard took possession of Agnes as though she were his own.

Presently the moon appeared, as he had predicted, shining down on the whitened earth; on the old-fashioned church, which stood on the top of the hill, with its mantle of ivy showing darkly green against the snow that glistened amongst its leaves; on the hill itself, down which ran a crooked pathway bordered by tall trees, that waved and whispered in the night breeze as though anxious to be rid of their burden of glistening snow; and on two figures in the garden below—a man and a woman.

The woman's face, framed in a heavy mass of dead gold hair, was calm and smiling—the man's white, set, and determined.

"Agnes!" Cora started at the pain in Leonard's rich tones, and drew back into the shadow of the balcony; every word he uttered came to her distinctly. "Agnes! my love! my darling! have pity on me, and answer my question! I cannot bear suspense."

Then a change came over the beautiful face, the mocking smile died from the thin scarlet lips, and the cold blue eyes drooped beneath her lover's passionate gaze, and then Cora saw by the pale light of the moon the fair golden head sink on to Leonard's breast, as he clasped the tall, perfect form in his strong, young arms.

And still the bells rang out upon the crisp cold air, pealing, trembling as if for very joy, while Cora stood with clasped hands and wildly-beating heart gazing upon the wreck of her life's romance.

She could not see her own face—how white it had grown, nor the deep lines that had come round the purple eyes; but she felt, as she laid her head on her white folded hands, that there was no goodness or truth in the world.

Cora, in her first agony, had quite forgotten her companion, but suddenly remembering, she turned to find herself alone, and then she recollected that he had said something about going in to get a cigar.

She saw his shadow on the untrodden snow after a time, and gathering her crushed senses together, she waited his coming with a proud, cold smile on her lovely face.

Agnes and Leonard had walked slowly away down the narrow brown path under the avenue of trees that led to the fields adjoining the grounds—she with downbent head, his arm encircling her rounded waist; and Cora's eyes followed their retreating forms till a turn in the path hid them from view.

"You will pardon me, Cora," said George Newcombe's soft voice—almost too soft and smooth for sincerity, some people were uncharitable to pronounce it; "but Sir Jasper kept me talking about this new house of his—and I knew you were safe."

"I have not been at all lonely," replied the girl, in steady tones. "See, the moonlight falls straight down on to the dear old church with its glittering spire and quiet graves. How ghostly the tombstones look! But the fields—do they not look lovely in their garb of white!"

George, instead of answering the hurried words of his companion, bent his dark head and gazed into the fair, proud face with an intent, earnest gaze that made the girl draw back a little into the shadow again.

"Why, how pale you look! Is it the moonlight, or what?" he exclaimed.

"The moonlight of course, George," she answered, with a short, hard laugh. "I wish you could see yourself; you are positively ghastly!"

"I think, mademoiselle, we had better return to the house before we have a serious quarrel. I can see the storm brewing in those violet eyes!" he said, with mock gravity, as he held out his hand.

The bells had ceased to ring for some time, and the silence seemed almost intense from the contrast as they retraced their steps along the snow-strewn pathway.

They found Sir Jasper making a speech about brotherly love with a glass of port-wine negus in one hand, while with the other he slapped Judith Denbigh and his brother, who stood beside him, on the back.

Tears were in the bright, keen eyes, but he had come back to old England for good, so he would not let them fall; besides, tears were for women—not men.

"Well, my boy," he cried, as George and Cora entered the room; "so you two are the first to come back to the uncle!" and a smile of infinite love lighted up the benign, manly countenance, telling of his great affection for George, his adopted son.

Agnes and Leonard were not long after them; they came in just as the party in the library were singing "Auld lang syne."

"What have you two been after?" asked Tom Denbigh, with a pleasant, unsuspecting

laugh. But Leonard started guiltily, and paled as he glanced at Cora, who was regarding the pair with a scornful light in her usually calm, blue eyes.

Agnes neither shrank nor paled. There was a triumphant expression in the cold eyes, and a flash of excitement on the pearly cheek, while she toyed restlessly with a costly gemmed ring which she wore on her left hand. She stole a covert glance at Leonard, but he had turned to answer some remark of George's, and did not notice the look.

"Looking at the moonlight on the fields and the church, uncle!" she said, with a silvery laugh, and in her delight she did what no one had ever seen the haughty, indolent Agnes do before, flung her white jewelled arms round Tom Denbigh's neck, and gave him a little hug.

Then followed a great deal of kissing and laughter, and merry words called back, as the girls went up the stairs, and soon the whole household lay wrapped in slumber.

CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning broke bright and clear; the pale wintry sun shone down on the whitened glistening earth, and the robins hopped merrily about the broad, wide lawn, pecking at the crumbs that Cora had thrown to them. Here and there peeped out a dark gleaming evergreen from which the snow had fallen, and the tall leafless trees stood motionless in the frosty air; all was calm and peaceful as a poet's dream.

Presently a slight figure, clad in rich red with filmy lace at throat and wrists, appeared at one of the windows directly facing the lawn, and Cora's sweet, musical voice floated out on the silent air.

"Is it not a pretty sight, Agnes? Do come and look!"

George Newcombe, who was bending over the couch on which Agnes was reclining, in the breakfast room, frowned slightly at this interruption; but Agnes, without appearing to notice him, rose with indolent grace, and crossed to where her cousin stood gazing out into the snow-clad garden.

Leonard was very silent during breakfast. He had had his first experience of Agnes's selfishness, and it was not pleasant; and somehow a feeling stole over him that he had made a fool of himself, and taken the dress when he could have had the gold. Was it that his love for Cora was not dead, only clouded over by a brief mad infatuation for a heartless scheming woman of the world?

Cora retired to her own room after breakfast, pleading a headache, leaving Agnes to amuse the two young men, for Sir Jasper and his brother were going into the town on some secret errand, and Miss Denbigh was fully occupied with household affairs.

It was not one of the pleasantest mornings Agnes had spent during her stay at Thanet House; for George Newcombe, seeing that Leonard was the favoured one, made himself on all possible occasions very disagreeable to his rival; and so, when the three were left alone, Leonard took a seat at her side, George brought his chair across and sat glaring in moody silence at the pair.

"George! I declare one would believe you were plotting a murder!" said Agnes, at last, though in her usual languid tones. "Those great dark vindictive eyes of yours make me shudder!"

"You cannot imagine how sincerely sorry I am," he replied, with a smile, but his face grew pallid as death at her words, and the murderous gleam was still in his eyes when he went to the piano and commenced a song that Agnes had professed to be enchanted with a few evenings back.

"Agnes!" whispered Leonard, under cover of the music; "darling, you have not repented your promise?"

"No, Leonard!" sighed the rich, low voice as the beautiful woman lifted her pale eyes, then dropped the white lids till their long golden

fringes swept her blushing cheeks; and Leonard as he gazed at the lovely form and perfect features, felt tempted almost beyond his strength to take her in his arms and press quick loving kisses on the smiling, scarlet lips.

"Hang the fellow!" he muttered; "he must see that he is in the way!"

But that was the very reason why George did not go. He hated Leonard, and did everything in his power to render him miserable. Glancing over his shoulder while he was singing, George saw the look that Agnes gave her cousin. No one would have recognized the smooth-voiced, handsome George Newcombe in the white, wild-faced man, who sang on in husky tones, and with blue, stiff lips that would scarcely perform their office.

"Curse him! He shall never possess her, that I swear!" he hissed through his parched lips, as he closed the piano with a bang that made the couple on the lounge start.

"Thank you, George, so much," murmured Agnes, with a soft, sweet smile. "That is one of my favourites."

But George had passed out of the room before she finished speaking, and as Leonard caught the girl to his throbbing heart they heard him slam the front door. Leonard forgot, as he held her in his arms, her fair face upturned to his, the episode of the morning. He remembered only that he, and he alone, possessed the right to hold this gloriously beautiful woman thus—that he alone could bring the bright blushes to the haughty face!

"My darling, you will never play me false!" he cried, passionately. "Swear, Agnes, that you will be true!"

And Agnes, laying one slim hand in his, whispered that nothing on earth should part them, sealing the vow with a kiss—the first she had given him of her own accord. They sat on undisturbed until the sound of voices in the hall told them that Sir Jasper and Thomas Denbigh had returned home, and then they went out to greet them.

"Hullo, youngster!" cried Sir Jasper, in cheery tones, his keen eyes sparkling from the drive through the crisp, frosty air, his face tinged with a healthy pink. "Where is Cora?"

"She is still in her room, uncle," replied Agnes. "Shall I call her?"

"Yes, call her down by all means. There goes the luncheon-bell."

Cora came down, looking pale, but she smiled brightly when her uncles kissed her fair face, asking how the poor head was.

"Better, uncle, thank you. I shall be quite well for our ball," was the ready answer, as she took a seat at the table, and a delicate colour rose to her cheeks as she met the gaze of Leonard's dark eyes. "He shall never think that I am fretting," she thought, and her heart gave a proud throb. "I will let him see to night that all is forgotten."

The two girls had chosen dresses for the ball which was to be given that evening, alike, pale blue satin brocade, with over-dresses of Brussels lace, looped with forget-me-nots and snowdrops, and very lovely they looked when, some two hours later, they stood together in the dimly-lighted drawing-room waiting, as Sir Jasper laughingly said, to be inspected.

"By Jove! Tom, don't they look splendid!" he cried, as he turned the light full upon the two.

Leonard did not say one word; but his eyes as they rested on Agnes Lester's glowing face spoke volumes.

Cora's proud heart throbbed as she saw that glance. Once it would have been for her; but she did not show it by look or gesture that she had even observed it. She turned with a swift, lovely smile to her uncle.

"Uncle Tom," she said, "do you really like my dress?"

"Like it? why yes, of course; but it is my pet I am proud of; you will be the belle!" he replied, taking no notice of her almost unconscious glance in Agnes's direction.

And indeed Cora, in her calm, pure, young beauty, was a woman to be proud of. Her great blue eyes looked almost black in contrast with the pale blue of her dress, and her perfect neck and arms gleamed like snow against the flashing jewels.

Judith Denbigh entered, after a few moments, looking like some old-fashioned picture in rich purple satin and antique lace. She was well-known for dressing in accordance with her age, and in perfect taste; that night she surpassed herself, and not a few both old and young gave a second glance at the small, slight, old lady with the silvery hair and sweet, smiling lips, as she moved with light-tripping steps among her brother's guests that night.

"It is a quarter past nine," she said, after she had duly admired her nieces' attire. "We had better go to the reception room. Hark! I think I hear carriage wheels."

And away she went, followed by her two nieces.

Soon after the guests began to arrive in quick succession, and as the great hall clock chimed the hour of ten the large ball-room was filled with light and laughter and music.

Greatly to the surprise of everyone Leonard opened the ball with his cousin Agnes, for the love affair between him and Cora was well-known to their friends, some of whom declared that Tom Denbigh was a thorough good-hearted fellow, but terribly pig-headed in this matter.

As the music commenced Lord Chestholm, a slight young fellow, with a thick bronze moustache and dark, wavy hair, led Cora forward, and Leonard, seeing the happy light in his large grey eyes, flushed.

"Does the prig imagine that she will have him, after all?" he muttered, biting his moustache, savagely, even while Agnes's fair face was near his own, her warm breath fanning his cheek, her heart throbbing against his.

The ball was at its height, the dancers whirled round the great room with bright, flushed faces and beating hearts. The dreamy music flooded out into the moonlit balcony overlooking the garden, where stood two figures dimly outlined against the shrubs that gleamed darkly green in the misty light; two figures, a man and a woman, the woman clad in pale blue brocade and priceless lace, with costly jewels on her neck and arms that flashed and glittered with her every movement. Raising her eyes, that gleamed with hidden triumph, to her companion's dark face, the woman spoke in soft accents thrilling with real or well feigned sorrow.

"You must not say such wicked things, George; you will learn to forget me soon."

"Agnes, do not trifle with me!" cried George Newcombe—for it was he. "In mercy's name give me an answer. Will you or will you not be my wife?"

There was a ring of desperation in his voice, and his face as he turned it towards the deep blue sky, where the stars were twinkling and the moon was shining in calm, silvery splendour, was pallid and drawn with emotion.

"I cannot give you an answer at once, George," replied Agnes, in a voice not quite so steady as usual.

For once in her life Agnes Lester felt sorry that she had played the coquette. She was thoroughly frightened at the passions she had roused in this man's heart. Why could he not be like the others, and when he found she had no love to give quietly bow to her decision?

"Darling, your answer shall be 'yes'!"

His arms were round her supple waist, his lips pressed hers in passionate kisses, and Agnes, though a tall woman, was like a child to him in his mad passion, and, try as she would, it was impossible to release herself from his embrace.

Leonard coming into the conservatory with Cora recognized the two standing there in the moonlight, and started back with a low, strangled cry,—

"Detestable coquette!" he said, in a hoarse

undertone, grasping Cora's slim hand in his. "Cora, do you see those two?"

"Yes, Leonard," she returned, in pretended surprise; "they are my cousin Agnes and George Newcombe."

"But she has no right to stand there with his—" He stopped short. He had not as yet spoken one word of his love for Agnes, and somehow he had felt in no hurry to do so. What would Cora think of his behaviour? he asked himself. He did not know that she had been an unseen witness to that love-scene in that snow-clad garden.

"Have you any right to dictate with whom she shall stand in the 'pale moonlight'?" said Cora, with a cold laugh, as she turned in the direction of the ball-room again.

Leonard's handsome face flashed, and he bit his lips to force back the bitter words that rose to them. Cora should never know that he had been fooled, as he termed it, by her beautiful, heartless cousin!

"I felt disgusted, that is all. George Newcombe does not bear a very good character amongst our set," he answered; "and I naturally felt indignant."

"Oh—cousinly regard!"

The sneer in the calm, icy tones was unmistakable, and Leonard winced, for he felt that he was acting a coward's part in not openly announcing his engagement.

Could Leonard Denbigh have read his own heart aright he would have been surprised. His mad passion for Agnes Lester was as different to the love he had felt for Cora as dark is from light, and, though he knew it not, it was already on the wane. His pride was hurt—not his heart—at the thought of Agnes Lester's coquetry.

Lord Chestholm and his mother were the first to go, and this was a signal for a general break up; for soon the great room was deserted, the lights were extinguished, and the members of the family had retired to rest.

CHAPTER VI.

During the next three or four weeks Sir Jasper kept Leonard pretty well occupied, for he was busy furnishing his new house, which was about half-an-hour's drive from Thanet House, and he referred to his nephew on all subjects.

Leonard chafed inwardly at this, for he could find no time to speak to Agnes of her flirtation with George Newcombe; and she, safe in the belief that he knew nothing, kept George in suspense for his answer.

George had no doubt what that answer would be. If Agnes had meant to refuse him she would have said so at once. So he argued, little dreaming that she was already bound by her most sacred promise to Leonard Denbigh. Better for him had she told him that his love was hopeless on that first night. It would have saved him from himself.

In the long months to come no haunting memory of a cruel, dastardly act of base ingratitude to a generous benefactor would have driven sleep from his burning eyes and peace from his guilty heart. But she smiled on him that soft, fascinating smile that had lured dozens to their fate, and so he, too, went blindly on to his doom. Perhaps—who knows—if she had been more like her pure and innocent cousin Cora, his life might have been a different one.

"To-morrow will be St. Valentine's Day!" said George one evening, as the four young people sat round the fire in Cora's own sitting-room.

Miss Denbigh and her brother had gone out to see some old friends, and Sir Jasper was busy in the library looking over some papers relating to his house.

"Yes, and I expect a great many valentines," she replied, softly, glancing up into his dark, passionate face with a coquettish smile. "Do you get many as a rule, Cora?"

Cora, who was leaning back in her low chair gazing steadily into the bright red flames, started as her cousin spoke.

"I beg your pardon, Agnes! I was thinking, and so did not hear what you said."

Agnes, who knew all about the love-passages that had passed between Leonard and her cousin Cora, laughed maliciously as she replied,—

"Dreaming of a lost love, Cora? Recreant lovers are not worth a thought, believe me. But to return to the original subject, I asked you if you were in the habit of receiving many valentines?"

"Oh, yes; dozens!" she said, calmly, taking apparently no notice of the unwomanly taunt, but her heart throbbed with mortification, and a deep red spot burned on her clear, pale cheek as she pictured the gratified smile that must have played over Leonard's face at her cousin's words.

They were sitting in the twilight and therefore she could not see his features as he sat wall back from the glowing fire with his arms folded across his breast.

"You will get one valentine to-morrow which I hope will please you!" and George bent his head till his dark eyes met the pale blue ones.

Leonard started forward as he caught the look on George's face, and saw the red colour that mounted to the roots of the girl's golden hair.

"Agnes!" he said, sharply, and she turned to him in languid surprise.

"Why, Leonard, you quite startled me," she said, quietly. "You have been so silent that I thought you had fallen asleep. Did not you, Cora?"

Cora made no answer. Though there was no love lost between them, she did not wish to be rude to her cousin, and she felt assured that Agnes was perfectly aware that Leonard had been watching her for the last ten minutes. She bent forward and poked the fire, and the flames leaping up the wide, old-fashioned chimney showed Leonard's dark face flushed with anger.

He rose suddenly, and stooping over the indolent form, whispered something into the dainty ear, then resumed his old attitude; that dark frown and angry flush still marking the careless beauty of his face.

The hall clock was only just chiming the hour of ten when the servant, at Cora's request, brought their bedroom candles, but as Miss Denbigh said they were all fatigued with their day's shopping—for the two girls had been with her in the morning on a shopping expedition—and would be glad of a good night's rest.

The 14th of February dawned bright and clear, a warm wind, laden with the promise of spring, came through the open window, and the musical sound of the church bells ringing for early morning prayer was wafted across the hearth, sending a thrill of hopefulness to Cora's heart as she stood at the hall door drinking in the fair freshness of the morning.

She was thinking of the last St. Valentine's Day when she had come out to meet Leonard so that he should be her valentine, he had laughingly told her. There was no moping sorrow in the pale young face, only an expression of thought and regret.

"I wonder who will be your valentine, Cora?" said Agnes Lester's low, seductive voice; and at that moment Leonard came round the side of the house with a smile on his handsome face.

"Good morning, Cora!" he cried, eagerly—almost as eagerly as in the dear, dead past. "You are the first person I have seen—my valentine!"

"You are quite gushing this morning, Leonard," and Agnes put her slim hand on Cora's shoulder as she spoke, a mocking, ugly glitter in her pale, blue eyes.

"Am I?" he returned, laconically, as he held out his hand. "You are the first person who has ever accused me of being 'gushing,'" and he laughed a short, hard laugh as he entered the hall and passed into the breakfast-room.

The young girl watched his retreating form, a slow smile creeping over her beautiful face. Her heart throbbed with bitter resentment at

the tone in which he had addressed Cora, but she would not show that she had observed it. Not now; she would wait.

"I say you girls!" cried Sir Jasper, as they two entered the breakfast-room, where the brothers, and Miss Denbigh, were standing in front of a blazing fire. "Don't you think you had better postpone the opening of those?" pointing to a pile of white cardboard boxes—some crushed, some perfectly spotless.

"Suppose we put it to the vote?" said Cora, with a bright smile; "those for postponing hold up your hands."

"What is the matter?" asked George Newcombe, who came in just as they all held up their hands; and on being told a dark frown crossed his brow—a frown that altered the whole expression of his face.

"Really, one would think that you were the most interested person, to judge by the vindictive manner in which you are carrying away at that poor fowl!" said Agnes, glancing with indolent scorn at his disgraced visage.

"Perhaps I am an interested person," was the answer, given in a low, significant tone, that brought a slight flush to the pearly skin.

"Do you remember what lovely valentines you had the year before last?" asked Miss Denbigh, addressing Cora, who flushed, then paled, as she answered, without looking up from her plate,—

"Yes, auntie!"

"I fancy you will not have very many this year!"

There was a mocking smile lurking round the thin scarlet lips, and a look of spite in the cold blue eyes, as Agnes bent forward and uttered these words in a low tone.

"Very likely not, Agnes," replied Cora, in her clear, girlish voice. "A great many of our friends will remember that I have recently lost my aunt, and, although I am out of mourning, will not consider that she has gone from my memory."

Agnes, with all her *sang froid*, had no words to answer this reproach—for reproach she felt it to be—and so she continued her breakfast in silence.

Leonard looked across the table at the lovely calm, *spirituelle* face, and then back again at Agnes, who was seated by his side; and in that glance there was an unconscious comparison of the two, not very complimentary to the beautiful woman who had infatuated his senses.

Breakfast over, the valentines were piled on the centre table, and the two girls commenced the pleasant task of opening them.

"How lovely!"

The exclamation came from Agnes. She had opened a small box, and disclosed, lying on a soft bed of pale blue velvet, a hoop of pearls set in dull gold.

"Who can have sent it?" she continued, glancing quickly at Leonard, but his face wore no tell-tale smile, so she turned to George Newcombe. "Is it not a beauty, George?"

"It is very pretty," he answered. "Will you wear it, Agnes?" he added, with betraying eagerness.

"Most certainly. It is perfect!"

In the excitement no one had noticed Cora draw back with flushed face and quivering lips, after reading some words written on a delicately-painted valentine.

"You do not seem pleased with your valentine?" said Leonard's voice at her elbow.

"Pleased!" she echoed, in scorn. "It is the greatest piece of impertinence and effrontery I have ever heard of!"

Leonard grew pale to his very lips, as he turned, without another word, and walked to the furthestmost window.

He was in a white heat of rage with Agnes, for he had heard George's whispered words about the ring and seen Agnes's glance as she murmured her reply—and Cora had received his valentine as though it were a deadly insult.

"Are you going for a walk, Leonard?" said Agnes, in a soft, sweet undertone, crossing the room and laying her white hand—on which gleamed George's ring—upon his shoulder.

"No, I am not," he replied; "but I wish to speak to you alone for a few moments, if you can spare time!"

"Oh, certainly!" she answered, with a graceful inclination of her fair head. "At once, if you like. Come!" and she pushed open the long French window and stepped out into the cool fresh air.

The trees were already beginning to put forth long green shoots, the birds were singing sweetly on their long brown branches, and the clear February sun was shining down on the fair earth in a pale golden flood.

The two lovers walked along the quaint old pathways in perfect silence, until they reached a quiet summer-house, far away from the house itself, in a small hollow.

Leonard paused here, and then drew Agnes into the summer-house, pointing silently to a seat, and thus they remained for some minutes—she idly turning the rings on her slim fingers with that slow, scornful smile on her parted lips, he gnawing his moustache and gazing in moody abstraction across the fields.

An impatient movement from Agnes at last roused him, and he turned to her with a savage gleam in his dark eyes.

"Do you mean to accept that fellow's ring, Agnes?" he asked, in a low voice.

He had never yet raised his voice to a woman, and great as was his passion, he kept it under in respect to her sex.

"I do not understand you, Leonard," she replied, calmly; but the smile faded from her lips, leaving her very pale.

"You understand me well enough, Agnes, so do not prevaricate. Did you mean what you said to George Newcombe this morning, or did you not?"

"Most certainly, if you are referring to the valentine he sent me! I have the ring now," and she held her hand out to him. "It fits perfectly."

"And you mean to keep it there?"

His voice was hoarse with suppressed passion, and his proud lips quivered as he turned his eyes, blazing rather with wounded pride than love, upon the fair face of his beautiful, false-hearted cousin.

"I mean to wear it—sometimes," was her only reply, given with a defiant uprising of the fair head, with its crown of dead-gold hair, while the blue eyes, so coldly blue, gazed at him in mocking scorn.

"Then, I will bid you good morning, Miss Lester. I have no doubt you will be able to find your way to the house," he said, haughtily, and with a slight bow he turned on his heel, and strode away through the straggling pathways under the tall, grim firs, then disappeared from sight behind a high hedge.

"So that is the tone you will take after our marriage," said Agnes to herself, quietly smiling, as she leisurely retraced her steps. "Master Leonard will find that I, too, have a spirit!"

It never occurred to her in her scornful arrogance that perhaps Leonard would not so easily forget her conduct.

CHAPTER VII.

A LONELY spot was the Glendale waterfall. Nothing broke the stillness save the thunder of the mighty torrent as it dashed in a glistening, silvery sheet down the rocky incline that led from its source.

Great moss-grown rocks lay around in wild picturesque masses, and as far as the eye could reach ran a narrow stream, overhung by drooping willows.

A romantic spot, too; for to the right and to the left stretched a deep, green carpet, dotted here and there with clusters of tall trees and bushes, which in the sweet summer time were rendered fair to the eye by the white briony by which they were overran.

There were innumerable natural caves and gleans in this secluded place, over which the sun was shining. A soft, balmy breeze was blowing, rustling the tiny leaves on their branches, and ruffling the long, pale grass.

There was a solemn grandeur in the scene. The stately elm, the broad-shouldered oak, just budding into leaf, the rocky hill looking as though it met the clear, grey sky above, and the steady roar of the rushing torrent! No sign of life save for the birds that hopped from bough to bough of the trees that overhung the stream!

Presently the sound of voices mingled with the rush of the water, then a party of gaily-dressed people came into sight. Sir Jasper—for it was the family from Thanet House who had broken the solitude of the glen—turned to his niece Agnes with a look of pleasure on his kind, old face, saying,—

"What do you think of the waterfall?"

"It is indeed worth seeing, uncle Jasper," she returned, languidly.

There was no enthusiasm in her nature, and she could not understand why Cora stood there with that calm, rapt expression on her lovely face, gazing at the scene before her.

"We are going to the Lover's Glen," said George Newcombe, taking Agnes Lester's slim, pink-gloved hand in his own, and placing it on his arm.

"I shall stay here with auntie," replied Cora. Leonard had already thrown himself on the soft, yielding sward at their feet, and Sir Jasper and Thomas Denbigh had walked away in the direction of a winding pathway leading to the height above.

Two days had elapsed since that scene in the garden, and the ring which Leonard had forbidden her to wear still gleamed on Agnes's slender finger. Yet he did not feel so despairing as he had thought he should, for of course their engagement was at an end; he only felt a deep, bitter anger against the woman who could not as she had done. He gazed absently after their retreating figures till only an occasional glimpse of Agnes's pale pink dress could be obtained through the thick underbrush; then he turned to Cora with a suppressed sigh.

Meanwhile, Agnes and George had passed up the long, tedious pathway, and so to the top of the hill, which commanded a splendid view of the waterfall and surrounding country.

"Will you sit down, Agnes?" said George, pointing to a great boulder of rock overhanged by a pollard willow, and screened by a clump of bushes; and Agnes seated herself, leaning back in an apparently unstudied attitude, that showed every superb line of her faultless figure.

"How soft and pleasant the air is," she murmured, twisting the rings round on her fingers. She had removed her gloves to pluck some wild flowers that had taken her fancy, and which were now lying withered at her feet.

"The air is lovely, Agnes; but it is not of that I wish to speak. Will you give me your answer now? Nay, you must, for I can bear this suspense no longer!" and he grasped both her hands in his, and attempted to draw her to him; but, with a violent effort, she released herself.

"Hush!" she whispered; and then he became aware that some one was standing on the other side of the bushes.

"Yes, Tom," said Sir Jasper's hearty, manly voice; "I have got over that absurd prejudice against cousins marrying—those are Judith's words, but I now endorse them. It is an absurd prejudice! But still, as I have always led George to believe himself my heir, I cannot disappoint him. I have made my will, for though I am hearty and strong still—"

"Come, old boy, I can't stand that! You know we all wish you a long life!" returned his brother, and the two listeners could detect the sound of tears in his tones.

"Of course, I know that; but as I said, I have made a will leaving the bulk of my money to George. My estate in Cumberland will go to Leonard, and he has his own money, so he cannot grumble."

"And now that is off your mind," cried Tom

Denbigh's voice, "suppose we return to the others, have lunch, and then march for home." Perfect silence reigned after those words. Not a sound broke the stillness, but as the ground was extremely soft, George concluded that they must have left the spot.

"You heard what Sir Jasper said!" exclaimed George, and there was a ring of exultation in his smooth voice. "Now Agnes, my peerless Agnes, will you give me your answer?"

"But I—" began Agnes, in a low tone.

"Nay, darling, do not bring in that word! I can offer you a home fit for a queen, jewels, carriages, things that I never thought to possess, for—with a scornful laugh—" the old fool, much as he prides himself on his health, cannot live for ever. He is seventy now and then—"

"George!" said Agnes, raising her eyes to his passive, pale face.

"Oh, of course, I am very fond of the old boy," he continues, fancying that cry was meant for a reproach, but he was mistaken. She was just congratulating herself for not having let Leonard announce their engagement when he asked her. "Still, I should prefer his money. Darling, is it yes?"

Agnes smilingly held out her hand, and he caught her to his breast, pressing kiss upon kiss on her scarlet lips. And even while she lay passively in his arms she sighed, for all the love her shallow soul had to give belonged to Leonard Denbigh.

After a time they remembered Tom Denbigh's remark about lunch, and rising hurriedly they made their way down the winding path, bordered by short, thick furze and prickly broom.

"We thought you were lost," remarked Cora, looking up from her plate, as they seated themselves on the grass on arriving once more at the waterfall. "We waited a long while, but you were so late in coming that we commenced."

Sir Jasper glanced covertly across at his adopted son; and George, meeting his gaze, coloured and turned away; while a cold, cynical smile that still had in it a speck of pain broke over Sir Jasper's kindly features.

Darkness was stealing over the earth when the carriage containing the small party from Thanet House drove up the avenue. A thin mist had risen, and was hovering over the square red-brick building, and the lights in the rooms gleamed warmly forth through the many small-paned windows.

"This evening is like my life," remarked Sir Jasper, as they walked across the lawn. "A little, very little, happiness and brightness peering through the mist."

"You are not well, Jasper," said his sister, laying her hand on his arm, while Cora looked anxiously into his face.

"Why are you looking like that, Cora? What if I am ill, you forget that I have money to leave," he cried, bitterly.

"Uncle!" it was Cora's voice, low and quivering with pain that uttered that one word, but there was a world of tender reproach in the tone that ten thousand words could not have expressed.

"Cora, my child, forgive me!" he said, drawing her to him. They were in the hall, and the light fell full upon her pale face and tear-dimmed eyes. "I know that my pretty Cora at least is true." But all that evening he remained moody and silent, answering their questions only in monosyllables; and Judith Denbigh confided to Cora as she kissed her that night, that she was afraid he was seriously ill.

Thursday arrived in due course, and as they rose from lunch Sir Jasper announced in a grave, subdued voice that he should not be able to attend Lady Chestholm's party fixed for that evening, as he had some very important business to transact.

"But will it not wait, uncle?" coaxed Cora, putting her hand up to his face, with a caressing touch. "It will do you so much good. Come for my sake!"

"No, Cora! Not even to please my pet can I leave this thing undone. We never know what may happen, and justice is justice!" And with these ambiguous words he stooped

and kissed her, and then walked from the room.

Palely the moonbeams gleamed through one of the upper windows of Thanet House, the mingled shadows of the tall trees outside, and the quaint old furniture within, casting queer, fantastic shapes athwart the carpeted floor. A massive bedstead faced the window, and the moonbeams stealingsly across the room, as though fearful that even their soft touch would awake the sleeper, rested gently on the calm features and silver hair of Sir Jasper Denbigh. Once he moved, and a smile like that one bestows upon a beloved one played round his mouth, and a name, breathed lowly, fell upon the stillness.

"George!" That one word, only it was evident the dreamer was happy.

Presently the door moved slowly on its hinges, and in the mysterious light there appeared the figure of a man. He advanced with stealthy tread a few steps; then, as though in fear, paused again with a guilty glance round the well-furnished room in which there seemed so many dark corners and lurking places; he went forward swiftly but noiselessly and drew aside the heavy curtain that draped the bedstead, and stood with folded arms gazing down at the placid face of the sleeping man. Sir Jasper's face, tinged even in slumber with the pink glow of health, was peaceful as a child, and the smile still lingered round the firm mouth. The man turned his head towards the window, and the pale moonlight showed a thin aristocratic face and dark eyes glittering with an unholy fire.

He shuddered as a distant clock slowly and distinctly chimed the hour—one, two, three. It sounded to him like the knell for his guilty soul, and when the last echo had died away in a soft quivering note he breathed a low sigh of relief.

Now was the moment! A cloud passed across the moon as he bent over the still, unconscious form. There was a slight movement as though the sleeper had been disturbed, and then utter stillness reigned, and Sir Jasper was once more alone!

But what is this! The features a moment back tinged with pink were pale and set and the eyes open, staring glassily at the moonlit casement, while a dull red stream slowly trickled over the white coverlet. There was no life in those pallid ghastly features, and the smile that had softened them was replaced by a look of agony. Sir Jasper Denbigh was dead!

"Uncle Jasper not down yet!" said Cora, in surprise, as they assembled round the breakfast table next morning.

"No, I have sent John up to see if he is unwell, or perhaps he has gone for a stroll," replied Tom Denbigh, looking up from his newspaper.

George Newcombe was seated by Agnes Lester's side, talking animatedly, while Leonard stood leaning against the black marble mantelpiece, watching every changing expression on his cousin Cora's face. His heart had returned to its old allegiance, but as yet he dared not speak.

Suddenly, amidst the gay laughter and the merry talk, there rang through the house a despairing cry—the cry of men and women—and Thomas Denbigh rose with a white set face, and a strange, undefinable feeling of dread at his heart.

Was that cry in any way connected with his brother? He asked himself, as he strode to the door, and flinging it open stood staring in speechless amazement at the group of affrighted servants who had gathered in the great hall, the women wringing their hands and moaning, the men silent, horrified.

"Joseph, what does this mean?" he said, almost sternly, in his dread.

"I—oh, poor Sir Jasper!" gasped the man.

Sir Jasper! His dread, his presentiment of evil was not then so foolish. Something had indeed happened to his brother, the only one left, and now, perhaps, he too—

"Tell me what it is, my man," he said again, pushing the thought from him with a mighty effort.

The rest of the family had followed him, and were standing gazing at the horror-stricken servants with wide, terrified eyes.

"I went up, sir, as you told me, and knocked two or three times, and receiving no answer I turned the handle and found to my surprise that the door was unlocked, so I walked in, and then—"

At this juncture the faithful old valet covered his face with his hands and sobbed.

"For Heaven's sake tell me the worst at once!" cried Tom Denbigh, in a hoarse whisper, as the man replied in a low trembling voice,—

"There on the bed lay Sir Jasper, stabbed through the heart, with the sun streaming in on his dead face!"

"Stabbed!"

The word sent a thrill of indignation through every heart. Nay, not every heart, for a feeling of exultation came over Agnes as she thought that now George was rich.

"Good heavens!"

These were the only words the bereaved brother uttered, but a strong man's agony breathed in the piercing accents, and the rugged features were convulsed with emotion.

When the horrible truth was told, Cora had reeled for a moment as though about to faint, but she knew that her aunt's grief was worse than her own, and, mastering her feelings with a strong effort of will, she turned, only just in time, to her aunt, who fell forward into her outstretched arms.

With the assistance of one of the servants she was carried up to her room, where she remained till long after the inquest; which proved nothing save that Sir Jasper had been foully murdered, but by whom there was not the slightest clue to tell.

After the funeral—that saddest and most solemn of ceremonies—the family assembled in the library to hear the reading of the will. The blinds had been drawn up and the warm sunshine glinted in upon the mournful group.

Cora sat between her uncle and aunt, who had been carried down for the first time since Sir Jasper's death, pale but quiet, with dark circles under the large blue eyes and a drooping curve to the sweet mouth. Tom Denbigh had aged ten years since his brother's cruel death; his usually upright figure was bent and his bronzed features were sad and careworn; but Judith, his sister, who was leaning back in her arm chair, looked utterly broken down, deep lines marked her pale, thin face, and her silvery hair seemed to have grown scant at the temples.

And Agnes, she also formed one of this waiting group; but, like George, there was no sorrow in her callous bosom for the man who had met with so untimely a death. And she shaded her face with one slender hand, so that they might not see her eyes, which were brimful of triumph.

The will was read, amidst breathless silence. George leant forward with a hungry look in his dark eyes, and the same golden shaft of sunlight that kissed Cora's fair, innocent face, fell upon his glossy head.

"You will be a very wealthy man, Mr. Newcombe," observed the lawyer, as he folded up the will. The bulk of Sir Jasper's immense fortune was left unconditionally to George; Fernlands, a snug little estate in Cumberland, went to Leonard. This, with a few legacies to friends, a settlement of two hundred a year on his two nieces, and a handsome gift to his brother and sister, formed the substance of the will.

Tom Denbigh listened to the soft voice of the lawyer, with a puzzled expression on his face; but no one noticed him in the excitement.

"I—I hope you will excuse me," muttered George, walking to the door; "this has been such a surprise. It has quite unnerved me," and without waiting for a response, he hurried out of the room.

"Poor George!" said Tom Denbigh, with a

faint grave smile; "he was very fond of him. But," he added, "Jasper told me that he had made a new will. I must have made a mistake."

Soon those friends who had attended the funeral took their leave, and those who were left behind—the family of the murdered man—crept up to their own rooms, glad to be alone.

Agnes gave a shiver as she passed the red room where Sir Jasper had slept.

"I shall write to Mrs. Lorton," she said, mentioning one of her fashionable friends, "and ask her if she can accommodate me for a little while."

"But why, Agnes?" asked Cora, in surprise.

"Why, because it gives me the horrors to move about this house after what has happened. I feel as if the place is uncanny. I wish," almost petulantly, "that Uncle Jasper had never come here! A murder is such an unpleasant thing to—"

"Hush, Agnes!" cried Cora, turning her great eyes, ablaze with indignation, upon her cousin's beautiful soulless face. "I am ashamed to hear a relation of my dear uncle's speak in such a heartless manner!"

"Ashamed!" echoed Agnes, with a laugh and a smile that somehow seemed to detract from her beauty. "Really, Cora, you are in a bad temper! But I will not quarrel with you now; I shall not be here much longer!" and she turned and walked away in the direction of their room.

She kept her word, and the next day was being whirled along to London as quickly as the train could bear her.

"Cora," said Leonard, in a strangely husky voice as they drove back along the quiet, country road after leaving the station, where they had gone to see her off, "I have something to say—something to ask!"

"What is it, Leonard?"

The voice was low and steady, but her heart throbbed passionately at his tone.

"My darling! Cora, my sweet cousin! will you forgive me for all, and take me back?" he cried, dropping the voice and catching her slender black-gloved hand in his own.

"Leonard, that cannot be!" she replied, sadly. Her voice was trembling now, and her great eyes were filled with tears. "I have forgiven you, but I cannot forget. Let the past be the past indeed. Do not speak so to me again—at least not yet—everything is all so recent."

"Oh, Cora, my love!" he exclaimed, with quivering lips, "I am a great unfeeling brute. But," he added, "your words have given me hope. I will prove to you that my love is, and always was yours, in spite of all that has happened."

When they drove up the carriage-drive at Thanet House Miss Denbigh and her brother were at the door, and something in the two young faces struck a chord of hope and peace in their hearts.

"I think Jasper was right," observed Leonard's father, mentioning his brother's name for the first time. "It is a foolish prejudice," and Judith, following the direction of his eyes, had no need to ask his meaning.

CHAPTER VIII.

"CLYNTON LODGE, MAIDA VALE."

"DEAR CORA.—You will, perhaps be surprised to hear that I am going to be married, and to George Newcombe. He proposed to me the day before Sir Jasper's death, and I had no opportunity of telling you, and afterwards it seemed unfeeling." (A smile bitter in its contemptuous scorn, broke over the fair face at that last word, then she returned to the perusal of her letter.) "The wedding is to be on the 20th; will you be my bridesmaid? I shall esteem it a great favour if you consent. Let me know as soon as possible, and with fond love to dear auntie and uncle,

"Believe me, your affectionate cousin,

"AGNES LESTER."

"P.S.—Do not forget to give my love to Leonard. I think George has asked him to be his groomsmen."

Six months had passed since that awful tragedy had been enacted in the red room at Thanet House, and Cora had put aside her heavy mourning at her aunt's request, and the old house had sunk back into its old, peaceful calm.

Only one thing was wanting. Leonard was away. He went soon after Agnes's departure, telling Cora, as he bade her good-bye, that when he came back he should ask her that same question, when he hoped he would receive a different reply; and Cora, blushing deeply, had raised her eyes to his face without a word, but he went away hopeful.

The murderer of Sir Jasper Denbigh was never found, and as the time passed on, Judith and her brother were content that it should be so. His discovery could not bring the dead to life; it would only rake up old sorrows and reopen wounds that were closed; and so, at the end of six months they had the bills, offering one thousand pound's reward for the apprehension of the murderer or murderers, taken down.

"What does Agnes say?" asked Judith Denbigh.

"She is going to be married, and—but there is the letter, auntie you can read for yourself," replied her niece, placing the note in her hand. "Of course I shall go," she added. "So as soon as you have the time to spare we will see about getting our things ready."

Crossing the room as she finished speaking, Cora pushed open the long French window, and stood gazing out into the garden. A soft balmy breeze came in, lifting the fluffy hair on her white brow, and fluttering the delicately-tinted lavender ribbons on her black robe. There was a tender light in the deep purple eyes, and the perfect mouth was curved in a loving smile. Perhaps Leonard would come to this wedding, and she would again see the face which was dearer than all others to her loyal heart.

Lord Chestholm and his mother had promised to stay at Thanet House during the absence of the family. They arrived in the evening of the day before they started, and they all sat down to supper, a very happy party in spite of their sorrow, whose bitterness was somewhat blunted by the tender hand of time.

They found Agnes and Mrs. Lorton waiting for them when they arrived at the end of their journey next day, and Cora thought her cousin looked more beautiful than ever, as she stepped forward to greet them with a bewitching smile on her scarlet lips.

"It is kind of you to come so soon. I am so glad," she cried, and the tone for her was quite excited.

"Well! we thought we would take advantage of our charming hostess's invitation to stay a fortnight," said Tom Denbigh, with a courtly bow; and Mrs. Lorton, a handsome dark woman, with snowy teeth, and a colour that rivalled a damask rose, bowed in response, favouring him at the same time with a gracious smile.

They were soon bowling along in the carriage, which, after a short time, drew up in front of a large stone house, with carved pillars on either side, the steps reaching to the roof.

"You will show your cousin her room," remarked Mrs. Lorton, as she led Miss Denbigh away, having consigned Tom Denbigh to her husband's care.

That evening was a very quiet, pleasant one. There were several guests at the dinner-table, amongst them George Newcombe, looking pale, but handsome as ever, though there was a peculiar watchful expression lurking in the gloomy depths of his dark eyes that spoke a conscience ill at ease.

Saturday, the day fixed for the wedding, broke bright and clear. The birds sang merrily in the old trees that sheltered the house from the gaze of passers-by, and the sun poured into the room where Agnes was being arrayed in her bridal robes in a flood of liquid gold.

"A good omen," observed one of the bridesmaids, setting her pink satin train more to her liking.

There is no need to describe the marriage ceremony, or to tell how Agnes walked with queenly even steps up to the altar, where George Newcombe was awaiting her; nor how Cora followed, with a pale smile on her lovely features, and yet more stately tread, in her sweet, unconscious grace. Suffice it to say that the wedding was over, the bells burst forth in a merry peal, reaching even to the room where the guests were seated, and George and his bride had started on their wedding tour.

Four days after the wedding there arrived at Clynton Lodge a letter for Thomas Denbigh, addressed in Lord Chestholm's handwriting.

"Bless my soul!" he almost shouted, as he finished reading.

"Why, Tom, whatever is the matter?" asked his sister, staring at him in amazement.

"The matter? Why, the matter is that, if what Lord Chestholm tells me is true, Agnes will not find her husband the wealthy man she now thinks him," he replied, more calmly. "You will pardon me for my unceremonious behaviour, but I must return home at once," he added, turning to his hostess, who has liked to assure him that they, her husband and herself, could quite sympathize with him—she was quick enough to see that something extraordinary had occurred.

Cora and her aunt were too surprised to speak, and Thomas Denbigh hastened off without offering a word of explanation, merely saying, as he got into the carriage, that he would write to them when he had learned more of the particulars.

Lord Chestholm was sitting in the library at Thanet House, when the carriage which had been sent to the station to meet Mr. Denbigh drove up to the door. In another moment they were shaking hands, and at Tom Denbigh's request Lord Chestholm commenced his story at once.

"Three days after you left a respectable-looking man called, and asked to see Mr. Denbigh. My valet, who happened to answer the bell, told him that you were from home. He then inquired if he could see any one who could communicate with you; then my valet came to me, and I asked the man in. Judge of my astonishment when he produced the copy of a will, dated exactly three months later than that under which George Newcombe had inherited, leaving every penny, with the exception of a few legacies, to your son Leonard. Sir Jasper told the man—he has a witness to prove the truth of his statement—not to bring forward this new will until he had been dead six months. There is no explanation of this extraordinary whim unless it be in these letters," he observed, in conclusion, handing his listener two letters sealed with Sir Jasper's seal, and directed, one to George Newcombe, the other to Leonard Denbigh.

"I must telegraph at once to Leonard," said his father, after a short silence, and rising he rang the bell. "There," he added, handing a slip of paper on which he had hastily scrawled a few words to the servant who appeared in answer to the ring, "take that at once, please, John. Now I must write to Cora."

"Do you know that I am very curious to learn what all this mystery means?" observed Miss Denbigh, as they all stood in the brilliantly-lighted dining-room after their return, in response to her brother's note, and her brother laughingly told her that she must curb it until after dinner.

And after dinner he kept his promise, telling them the strange tale of the later will as they sat in the drawing-room.

The sweet, subtle scent of flowers stole in at the open window, and the musical ripple of bells was borne across the heath in a faint whisper. And as the story was finished the twilight closed in, and all Nature was hushed as though holding her breath, so that the little

party should not be disturbed from their silent thoughts.

"I have telegraphed to Leonard. He will be here by to-morrow," said Tom Denbigh presently, and Cora started. Her thoughts had been far away, and her uncle's voice breaking the silence so suddenly startled her, and that name sent the blood to her temples in a rich tide.

The lights were brought soon after this, and then Lord Chestholm asked Cora to sing. It was the first time that the piano had been opened since Sir Jasper had died, and there was a slight tremor in the rich voice as she commenced a simple Scotch ballad; after that she played an accompaniment for Lord Chestholm, while the three elder ones sat listening in calm, peaceful enjoyment. Never very late, they retired earlier than usual that evening, in order to be up betimes to receive Leonard, who was expected by the first train.

"He will be here in half-an-hour, auntie!" It was Cora's sweet voice, thrilling with tender love, that spoke these words. She was standing on the lawn in the bright sunshine, and the birds singing blithely in the grand old trees—the faint odorous scent of many flowers filling the morning air sent a thrill of gladness through her heart. She was attired in a robe of soft, grey cashmere, and the fair face looked fairer than ever in its calm, tranquil beauty, after the sorrows and trials through which she had passed.

"Yes, dear," replied her aunt. "But come, Lady Chestholm must have finished writing those letters by now, and may think we neglect her." And so they left the bright sunny garden and sought the library, where they found Lady Chestholm reclining in an easy chair, gazing sadly out at the fair landscape that lay before her, for the window commanded a view of field, heathland and silvery streamlet.

"Hark, there is the carriage!" Miss Denbigh cried, suddenly, almost immediately after they entered, and they all hurried out into the hall where Leonard stood, looking more manly and sunburnt than of yore, but still the old Leonard for all that.

Cora greeted him calmly, even coldly, in her anxiety to hide the love that rose and surged within her at sight of his handsome face, and Leonard, mistaking that calmness for indifference, felt his heart turn like ice. He went at once to his own room, and after removing the travel stains from his face, descended to the dining-room where the others were assembled.

"Len, my boy!" began his father, laying his hand on his shoulder; "prepare yourself for a great surprise. You are Sir Jasper's heir, and not George Newcombe!"

"What, sir?" cried Leonard, flushing beneath the bronze. "And Agnes has married a beggar, after all her scheming." These last words were not spoken aloud.

"It is true!" replied his father; and he then proceeded to explain the conditions of the will.

"And have you written to George?" asked his son; a touch of pity in his voice, for he knew that his false beautiful cousin had married George Newcombe for his money, loving himself all the while.

"Yes, and I have sent him the letter. Here is the one addressed to you," and he handed him the packet.

"Excuse me for a few moments," said Leonard, turning to Lady Chestholm, who smiled up graciously into his handsome face.

"I wonder what that letter contains!" observed Judith Denbigh.

Meanwhile Leonard stood at the open window in his own room, the warm breeze lifting the heavy dark waves from his brow, and fluttering the pages of the letter while he read, with pallid cheek and quivering lip.

"My dear nephew," it ran, "that old and silly prejudice of mine has died out, and the dearest wish of my heart is that you and Cora will marry. But my purpose in writing to you is not to speak of that, but of a weightier matter."

"You remember the day of the picnic Agnes

and George strolled off together to visit the Lovers' Glen. Well, it so happened that Tom and I took the same path, and, not being aware of their nearness to us, I told him that I had made my will, leaving all my money to George. Tom—I mean your father—left me then to hurry the lunch.

"Imagine my surprise and sorrow when I heard George, his voice hoarse and strained—George, whom I had brought up and loved as my own son—whisper to his companion, 'Agnes, you hear, I am to be his heir! The old fool cannot live for ever!'"

"I would not wear that the words are correctly string together, for his tones rose and fell with emotion, but they were enough for me. The night you went to Lady Chestholm's musical soirée I paid a visit to a lawyer in the town, and made a new will, under which you, my boy, will inherit what that arch hypocrite will fancy, when the first will is read, belongs to him. I am not naturally revengeful, but I cannot help smiling when I think of his disappointment." Leonard, the letter went on, as though the writer had been suddenly overpowered with a sense of the mystery of death: "Something tells me that I shall not live much longer! Remember my last words spoken as from the grave, Cora, my sweet faithful Cora, loves you; but do not link her fate with yours until you are sure of yourself. It grows late; already the moon has risen; flooding the heath with silvery light; and the old church stands at the top of the hill in silent grandeur. Farewell! For when you read this, I shall have bid an eternal farewell to earth."

"Dear old boy!" muttered Leonard, hastily, turning his eyes in the direction of the church where Sir Jasper slept. "It must have been a terrible blow to him! He stood there for some moments; then, with a hasty exclamation, turned and descended the wide staircase, and again entered the dining-room. "Read it aloud, please, father," he said, handing the letter to Tom Denbigh, who read it amidst a hushed silence.

"I never liked his voice," was Lady Chestholm's comment. "It was too smooth, and his eyes, they were treacherous eyes!"

No answer was made to this remark, but she felt that her words were echoed in every heart: Luncheon being brought in at that moment this conversation was changed for lighter topics.

"Great Heaven above!" Agnes Newcombe looked up in indolent surprise, and a faint tinge of colour rose to her cheeks as she saw the ghastly change that had come over her husband's face.

"What is it, George?" she asked, rising and laying her hand upon his arm.

They were staying at Naples, that beautiful city of orange groves and silvery streams. Outside the birds gave forth a trill of softest melody in the full-leaved trees; and George turned as if unheeding her smooth, seductive voice, and gazed fixedly at the water that flowed peacefully at the end of the garden below. Not a breath stirred the calm smoothness of the stream, and the leaves hung listless on the trees as though hushed into silence by the song of the birds, and Agnes felt a superstitious thrill pass through her. It seemed as if Nature drew back awed.

"And for this I stained my hands with blood!" he whispered hoarsely, still with that fixed look on his death face.

Blood! Agnes's fair, haughty face paled, and the scarlet lips grew rigid at that word. A thousand haunting memories flashed through her mind as she stood there like some beautiful statue by her guilty husband's side. This, then, was the meaning of his restless wanderings, his sudden starts and fearful glances at every dark and secluded spot. He was a murderer!

She did not speak—no words would come through her stiff lips; but better as it was, for there was no pity in her heart for the man who had stained his soul with blood to gain

her, and whom she had married for his money. No, only a feeling of utter loathing for the man filled her mind, as she gazed upon the drawn, haggard features and bloodshot eyes. She guessed whose blood had been shed by those white nervous hands, and a shudder ran through her.

George Newcombe turned abruptly and went up to his own apartment, leaving the letter which had called forth those despairing words upon the breakfast table, and his wife took it up mechanically and read it through to the end. There was a scornful light in her pale eyes when she laid it down, and the thin-lipped mouth was curled in a contemptuous smile.

"Poor wretch!" she said, aloud. "But I suffer too. What is to become of me, chained for life to a murderer, and he as poor as a church mouse?"

As if in answer to her question there rang, with fearful distinctness, through the long corridors the sound of firearms, after that dead silence, then the rushing of many feet, and a man with sorrowful visage, bowing low before the haughty English lady, informed Agnes that she was a widow!

"Your cousin Agnes writes that she is going to Germany with her friend, Mrs. Lorton. She bears up wonderfully under her terrible affliction," said Miss Denbigh to Cora, as they stood at the breakfast-room window in Thanet House a month later.

Cora murmured a very small "yes;" for she had burnt a letter from that young lady, in which she told her cousin that perhaps it was all for the best that George was dead, though she wished his death had not been so terrible a one.

George, being dead of course there was no trouble about the new will, and, with the exception of an extra two hundred a year to Agnes, the money had all been made over to Leonard. Lord Chestholm and his mother had gone to Paris, and would not be back till Christmas.

It was a glorious day, more like a day in the middle of August than November. The flowers no longer scented the air with their sweet perfume, but the birds hummed drowsily in the trees that overhung the stream that wound its way at the end of the grounds belonging to Thanet House, and the sun shone down brightly, even warmly. Here by the water's margin the silver weed lifted their heads to the blue sky listening in unwearied joy to the soft song of the stream as it rippled on its way. And here Leonard bent his steps, with Cora by his side, whispering anew his love and longing into her delicate, dainty ear. "Cora, dearest!" he cried, passionately, stopping beneath a weeping willow that spread its branches over the deep green grass and clear water. "Have I not waited long enough yet? Surely you must know that my love is true—true until death!"

The girl raised her deep purple eyes to his dark passionate face, and that glance told him that he was forgiven, for he gathered the slender form close to his heart, and pressed a long tender kiss upon her perfect lips. And so we leave them, like the rich golden sunshine flooding heath and stream, the sleepy hum of birds filling the air, and on their faces and in their happy throbbing hearts the light of the sun that never sets!

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

It bears the palm.—The hand.

A fine man.—The magistrate.

Frivolous of trouble.—Green apples.

Others called to mind.—The nursery maid.

Progress.—A traveller who had been in the far East told a French lady that Hindu girls are taught to think of marriage as soon as they can talk. She replied, "French girls are not; they don't require teaching."

A sermon recently preached on the effect of a decision under the Land Act had for text the words, "And the rent is made worse."

Mrs. Bowers says that if she has a dog she wants one of those great Sarah Bernhardt dogs that dig those dear old monks out of the snow in Switzerland. Dead Anna had earned his

A lawyer says that a convenient way of testing the affections of your intended is to marry another woman. If she don't love you, you will find it out immediately.

John asked Julia if she would have him. "No," said she, "I will not have you," but before John could recover from the shock, she archly put in, "but you may have me."

"I do wish you would come home earlier," said a woman to her husband. "I am afraid to stay alone. I always imagine there's somebody in the house, but when you come I know there ain't."

Felix Lectures.—"What have you been doing since I last saw you?" "I've been attending a course of free lectures." "A course of free lectures!" "Yes, I was married a week after we parted."

"Many says you can't come to see her any more," said a boy to his sister's admirer. "Why not?" "Because you came to see her every evening now, and how could you come any more?"

"I say, Johnny, can you tell a young tender chicken from an old tough one?" "Of course I can." "Well, how?" "By the teeth." "Chickens have no teeth." "Yes, but I have."

"Good morning," said a man to a woman. "Now, my dear, you must do as the Romans do," said old man Scroggins to his wife on their arrival in Italy. And the first thing the old lady saw was a boy trying to stand on his head in the corner of a railway station.

A will is on record in which the testator makes the modest request that the executors bury him "in the plainest manner possible by the side of my dear wives—whichever may be the most convenient."

Is an art gallery? That artist is a friend of yours, is he not? "Well, yes; he used to be, but one day he was fool enough to ask me how I liked his pictures, and I was fool enough to tell him."

Two gentlemen passed before an owl set up in a bird-stuffer's window, and discussed it for five minutes, deciding that it was the worst case of "botchery" in stuffing they ever saw; and then the bird woke up and moved his head.

The painter Z. has a comical little servant. The other day Madame Z. scolded her for being away all day. "Madame does not know," replied the ingenious *coiffeur*, "that monsieur ordered me to go to the Salon and remain all day." "What for?" "To be a crowd in front of his picture."

"Why, my dear," said poor little Mr. Penhecker, with a ghastly smile, "why would the world without woman—lovely woman—be like a blank sheet of paper?" Mrs. P., who had just been giving the little man "a piece of her mind," smiled, and "could not think." "Why, because, don't you see, love?" said the long-suffering one, "it wouldn't even be ruled."

REALISTIC.—The Professor of Painting has just entered the class-room, where smoking is strictly prohibited. Here he finds an artist-student holding in his hand a newly-filled cherry pipe. Professor (ironically). "What a queer paint brush you have got there; what are you going to do with it?" Student: "Oh, I am going to make the clouds with it!"

SWEET INFANCY.—Some infants at an orphan asylum were asked to name a few animal productions. Many correct answers were given. One infant, however, sang out, "Sweets, sir." The examiner was staggered. "What sweets do you mean?" "Bulls'-eyes, sir."

SOCIETY.

Mrs. LANGTRY, it is reported, will shortly arrive in England, but her stay will be limited. She is going to Paris to study with Regnier, and returns to America in the autumn. The net gains of her theatrical tour in the States are between £15,000 and £20,000.

Mr. MACKAY has been living for some years between Paris and Mentone, but he contemplates returning home this "fall." He is building a magnificent house in New York for a winter residence, and for a summer abode he already possesses a splendid domain in Nevada, on which he has erected a house as large as Buckingham Palace, and quite as sumptuous in its interior arrangements. Mr. Mackay's income averages £150,000 per month, and there does not seem any prospect of the mines from which he derives his wealth becoming exhausted; but when they do he will have a mighty "pile" to fall back upon.

The ancient city of York is smartening itself up, says the *World*, against the visit of the Prince of Wales, who goes there about the middle of July to open the Royal Agricultural Show. Everybody is painting and cleaning; the houses look as spick-and-span outside as though they were in Holland. Three new coats of a light sort of anemone green, have been applied to the beautiful Lendal Bridge, with its wide single arch. Out on Knavesmire—once the Tyburn of York, now the racetrack and parade-ground—preparations are being rapidly pushed forward for what promises to be one of the most successful shows on record.

The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh intend to remain at Coburg till the middle of October, when they are going to Italy for some weeks before returning to England. The Prince of Wales is expected to visit Coburg early in September during his stay in Germany. During his stay at Berlin the Duke will be invested with the insignia of the Order of St. John by Prince Albrecht of Prussia, Grand Master of the Order. The Duke is said to have worn six uniforms before he reached Moscow for the coronation festivities. Lord Wolseley religiously stuck to his grey ulster during his progress to the same city. Many foreign officers are said to have imagined that he was wearing the new grey uniform in which the army will be shortly disguised.

A LADIES' cricket-match is a novelty; and if this sort of thing continued, there would be an additional reason for female dress reform. A match is reported as having been played at Rickling Green, between two sides of seven each, the numbers possibly being limited by the prevailing scarcity as yet of good lady cricketers. The sides were captained by a Miss Osborne and a Miss Smith, and the former won the match easily by an innings and forty-six runs. Miss Osborne herself made 101 runs in fine style; but of course, run-getting depends somewhat on the bowling, and ladies have not yet mastered the art of "fast round-arm" or "breaking" balls.—*World*.

The statement that Her Majesty has accepted the proffered hospitality of the Countess of Crawford and Balcarres' Italian villa for a short *sejour* in the autumn is perfectly true. When the Queen went to the Riviera last year the same offer was made, but Her Majesty declined it. It is stated that as soon as the photographic view of the Villa Palmieri was shown to Her Majesty about a fortnight ago, she at once accepted the Countess's renewed proposition. It is extremely probable that nowhere in England or the Continent is there a more magnificent display of ornate architecture, and the lovely surroundings enhance the glory of the myrtle bower in which the villa is set like a rare gem.—*Society*.

STATISTICS.

The total number of pudding furnaces in operation at the end of 1892 in the United Kingdom was 4,369, being 814 less than in the preceding year.

SILK FACTORIES IN FRANCE.—Since the panic in 1848, the number of silk spinneries and silk dressing establishments in France has declined from 1,684 to 1,317, and the number of operatives from 67,698 to 43,868, the total horsepower, steam and water, from 6,295 to 5,358; whereas the number of spindles has increased from 942,106 to 1,064,109. This shows that, although silk industry, on the whole, is not in France what it was in 1873, yet, in some shape or another the number of spindles has increased, although but slightly. The greatest number of spindles in operation is in the department of Nîmes, where there are 437,746; next in the Loire, 244,200; next in importance is the Isère, with 140,174; then follows the Drome with 85,702; then Vaucluse with 49,253; and, finally, Aix with 26,272; and the Rhone departments with 26,800. Remaining departments are from 8,600 downwards.

GEMS.

The well-bred lad has very few wild oats to sow.

If you count the sunny and cloudy days of the whole year, you will find that the sunshine predominates.

The untruthful man makes a poor companion and a worse friend.

Harsh words have frequently alienated a child's feelings and crushed out all love of home.

How people deceive themselves when they think those around them do not know their real characters.

Affection in any part of our carriage is lighting up a candle to show our defects, and never fails to make us taken notice of, either as wanting sense or sincerity.

False happiness renders men stern and proud, and that happiness is never communicated. True happiness renders them kind and sensible, and that happiness is always shared.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RHUBARB PUDDING.—Line your pudding-dish with slices of bread and butter; cover with cut-up rhubarb, strewed with sugar; then slices of bread and butter, and so on alternately until your dish is full, having the rhubarb and sugar on top; cover with a plate, and bake half-an-hour. Eat it warm.

A FRENCH WAY OF WASHING CLOTHES.—A system of washing clothes has lately been introduced in some French towns which is worthy special mention. Its economy is so great as to greatly reduce the cost. This the process: Two pounds of soap are reduced with a little water to a pulp, which having been slightly heated, is cooled in ten gallons of water, to which is added one spoonful of turpentine oil and two of ammonia; then the mixture is agitated. The water is kept at a temperature which may be borne by the hand. In this solution the white clothes are put and left there for two hours before washing them with soap, taking care in the meantime to cover the tub. The solution may be warmed again and used once more, but it will be necessary to add a half a spoonful of turpentine oil and another spoonful of ammonia. Once washed with soap, the clothes are put in hot water, and the blue is applied. This process, it is obvious, saves much labour, much time and fuel, while it gives the clothes a whiteness much superior to that obtained by any other process, and the destructive use of the wash-board is not necessary to clean the clothes from impurities.

MISCELLANEOUS.

AFFECTION.—It may certainly be said of some people that affection is their nature. Nobody has ever seen them without it. They are incorrigible from native incompetence.

UNDER the laws of Providence, life is a probation; probation is a succession of temptations; temptations are emergencies; and for emergencies we need the preparation and the safeguard of prayer.

A CURIOSITY OF NATURAL HISTORY.—Oldest of all defensive methods is that of snapping off the tail. The blind-worm, or slow-worm, is a little snake-like lizard common in the old world. When alarmed, it contracts its muscles in such manner and degree as to break its tail off at a considerable distance from the end. But how can this aid it? The detached tail then dances about very lively, holding the attention of the offender, while the lizard himself slinks away. And for a considerable time the tail retains its capability of twisting and jumping every time it is struck. The lizard will then grow another tail, so as to be prepared for another adventure. There are other lizards which have a similar power, though in less degree.

ELEPHANTS.—Thick as is an elephant's skin no living creature suffers more from flies, mosquitoes, leeches, and other vermin. The pores are very large, and gadflies and mosquitos, &c., worm themselves into the hollow and suck to repletion. Thus the whole day long the elephants are constantly throwing up dirt, or squirting saliva or water, to get rid of these pests, to the great annoyance of their riders. They are very human-like in many of their ways. They get a piece of wood and use it as a toothpick. They scratch themselves with the tip of their proboscis, and, if they cannot reach the place with that, they take up a branch and use that. They natives of Ceylon say that they plug up bullet-holes with clay.

SQUANDERED BLESSINGS.—If we consume all and save nothing, we must surely come to the end of our resources by-and-by. This principle does not apply only to our worldly means. We have to husband our working powers and the brain power whence they spring, as we have to husband everything else that we possess; and to eat up in a short time what ought to last for all our life, is bad management, and the end will assuredly prove its evil. We may do the same thing with friendship. We can eat up a friendship as we can eat up everything else, and leave ourselves no crumbs to go on with, out of all that large cake that once was ours. If we throw too much on our friends, make too many demands on their sympathy, their patience, their good nature, their allowances, their generosity, we shall end by eating up in a short time the cake of love that should have lasted us to the end. Many a friendship has been squandered in this manner by excess of demands, and many a love has followed suit. By the folly of jealousy, which, once a stimulant, becomes at last a poison; by the folly of display which, once a delicious kind of enchantment, becomes at last an oppressive nightmare; by the folly of that uneasy need of perpetual assurance, which, once gladly responded to as the sign of delightful vitality, becomes at last a tyranny too onerous to be borne; by all these absurdities and extravagances is the food of love devoured and destroyed, and the cake which should have lasted for a lifetime eaten and done with before half the journey has been gone through. We eat our cake too greedily, too inconsiderately. When it is gone we sit down and cry, and wonder how it has come about that we have nothing left to go on with. If we had husbanded our resources they would have lasted; it was our excess which left us poor so soon, as many broken-hearted people find out when too late. If we are wise, we will make some calculation in our life, and say what we shall spend now and what we shall keep for the future.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

M. D.—*AEI* means *For Ever*. It is a Greek word.

ESTHER.—The story was written by Miss Braddon.

ALDA.—The landlord can distrain for rent.

HORSEMAN.—Saddles were in use in the third century.

GRACE.—George means "a husbandman"—James "deceitful."

PIT.—The fire insurance company is liable. Hand-writing very good.

D. V. S.—The marriage is quite legal though in a false name.

ROSY.—The Lily is a native of Persia, Syria, and Italy.

S. P. M.—There is a town Cambridge in the United States. It is in Massachusetts.

R. N.—Victoria Park was completed and opened to the public in 1845.

R. D.—Chloride of Lime is as good as anything; but indoors Condry's Fluid should be used.

DONA.—The first savings bank was instituted at Berna, in Switzerland, in 1787.

INQUESTER.—Sir Walter Scott was born on the 15th of August, 1771.

GARDENER.—Persons can be punished for the adulteration of seeds under the Act of 1869.

EFFERTON.—The Salic law was a law preventing females inheriting the throne.

DAIRY.—If your sweetheart put a bayleaf in his letter he meant to infer that he "changed his mind in death."

ALFRED M.—A father and son may marry a mother and daughter, and two brothers may marry two sisters.

ANNIE B.—*Lucy* means "light." 2. A very pleasant looking young lady, and of the right age to be married.

D. B.—The line, "Procrastination is the thief of time," occurs in Young's *Night Thoughts*.

DAIRY L.—The custom of kissing the hand of sovereigns, chiefs, or great men, arose among the Greeks.

MINA.—Artificial sapphires have been made of equal parts of alum and sulphate of potash, and were very creditable imitations.

EMME.—Being a brunette you could wear the pale blue tie with perfect propriety. It would go well with a brown dress.

P. M.—The principal arcades in London are: The Burlington, in Piccadilly, opened in 1819, and the Lowther Arcade in the Strand, opened in 1831.

L. V. G.—Turnpikes were set up in 1663, and were finally abolished in the neighbourhood of the metropolis in 1872.

MOSS ROSE.—Serfdom was abolished in Russia in 1861-1863. Nihilism has grown up since that period; many of the nobility are involved in it.

A. N. M.—The Queen has never touched a person to cure scrofula, or king's evil; George I. put an end to the practice in 1704.

M. Y. S.—The manufacture of velvet was long a secret of the Italians, the chief seats of it being Genoa and Lucca.

APPARI.—Rome was captured by King Victor Emmanuel's troops under General Cadorna in September, 1870.

ORA.—Java belongs to the Dutch. The capital is Batavia, which is also the metropolis of all the Dutch settlements in the East Indies.

E. F. T.—The present times of opening and closing public houses are regulated by the Licensing Act of 1873, known as Bruce's Act.

PEDESTRIAN.—A thousand miles were walked in 930 hours by Miss Bella St. Clair, 25th July, and the following days in 1876.

VETERAN.—The great Sir Robert Peel was mainly instrumental in carrying the Catholic Emancipation Bill in 1829.

ATHLETE.—Your friend is right. Three-and-a-half miles an hour is quite enough to walk on a tour, if the scenery is to be enjoyed with any comfort.

M. A. B.—We have no receipt for making "beer from peashells." Perhaps some of our readers can oblige you.

F. M. T.—The black spots are caused by obstructed perspiration. Squeeze them out, and bathe the part with a little dilute spirits of wine.

A. M. N.—1. The 27th of March, 1862, was a Thursday. 2. In the language of flowers, the deep red rose means "modesty."

ALIE F.—A little citrate of magnesia would probably help you. Live sparingly and plainly, and take plenty of exercise.

J. S. F.—The girl is probably only teasing you, and trying to cure you of your unreasonable jealousy. Do not sulk any more. It is only natural that, at her age, she should require a little relaxation and amusement, and as long as she does not flirt with others you ought not to begrudge it to her simply because you cannot go out yourself.

PEARL.—The sentence is quite correct. We do not say "between you and I," but "between you and me." It is also a vulgarism to say "like he did." It should be "as he did."

ALLIE.—The juice of a lemon, a couple of ordinary pieces of loaf-sugar, and a bottle of soda water is the cool and refreshing drink usually known as "lemon squash."

S. P.—1. Emma means a nurse. 2. The young man is liable to an action for breach of promise of marriage, and ought to be made to pay dearly for his heartless desertion.

ISTENDING R.—It is hard to recommend, but probably Canada would best suit your requirements, as there is a large field for an energetic and persevering man in that country.

ALBERTA.—A machine similar to the velocipede of the present day was known as far back as 1779; but the revival which has given rise to the bicycle and tricycle clubs of the present day dates from about 1867.

F. R. S. I.—The name of Kingstown, Dublin, was given to the town previously called Dunlary in compliment to George IV., who embarked there for England at the close of his visit to Ireland in 1831.

P. B. W.—Snuff-taking in England is said to have taken its rise from the vast quantities captured during Sir George Rooke's expedition to Vigo in 1702, subsequent to which the practice became pretty general.

EMMET P.—To make lemonade, take powdered sugar, four pounds; citric or tartaric acid, one ounce; essence of lemon, two drachms; mix well. Two or three teaspoonfuls in a glass of water makes an excellent drink.

BROWN OR GREY.

"What colour, tell me, Amy,
Shall be my hero's eyes?
I will not have them hazel,
Nor blue as summer skies."

Sweet Amy looked up shyly,
Then turned her face away,
And said, in tones most tender,
"I think I'd have them grey."

"Why, Amy, I think brown eyes
Are lovelier by far;
And then they're so expressive—
At least sometimes they are."

The pen drops from her fingers,
The romance is forgot.
Is she dreaming of the hero
Who claims her every thought?

The eyes we love are brightest
What'er their colour be,
I think that I, like Amy,
Grey eyes would rather see.

J. C. M.

ROSE.—To clean light kid gloves put them on, as if to wear, and wash in soap and water as if washing the hands. When they look dull and the dirt is out hang them up, and when dry they will look nearly as good as new.

OLD BRIAR.—The word tobacco is evidently taken from the name of a place; but antiquaries are not agreed as to whether that place was Tobacco, a province of Yucatan, New Spain, the Island of Tobago, one of the Caribbees, or Tobacco, in the Gulf of Florida.

A. R. B.—The Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park, were opened in April, 1837. The animals from Exeter Change were moved to the Surrey Zoological Gardens in 1832, and the menagerie in the Tower was transferred the year previous to Regent's Park.

T. D. R.—There is no disparity in a man being eight or ten years older than the woman he intends to make his wife, but anything beyond that would be in most cases too much. It is always best, if other circumstances are propitious, for the man to be the elder of the two.

ORIANA.—1. Robert Burns, the Scottish poet, was born near Ayr, January 25, 1759, and died at Dumfries, July 21, 1796. 2. To harden the feet, bathe them in a weak solution of alum. 3. January 6, 1839, came on Sunday. 4. There will not be five Sundays in February until 1920.

DARK-EYED ALICE.—1. It is a tradition among lovers that it is unlucky to exchange portraits, but it is now-a-days so generally done without any evil consequences following, that you may give your sweetheart your portrait and accept his in return with very little fear. 2. Not at all; quite the reverse.

DELTA R.—There are some daughters who cannot get along with their own mothers, and marrying, bring reproach upon the mothers of their husbands, and discord into homes that were always peaceful ones until they entered them. It is the manners that does all this. A daughter who has been trained to show the same consideration for members of the family as for persons outside it, whose good opinions she desires to win, will not bring the apple of discord into the home which her husband takes her to, even though there be a mother-in-law in it. Such causes as she may fancy she has for complaint she will shut up in her own heart, and her love and respect which he shows his mother: knowing well that good sons make good husbands, and that where true affections exist in a home circle, it is the work of a demon to seek to disturb it.

BEANICE.—Strawberries and raspberries are preserved with one quarter pound of sugar to one pound of fruit. The sugar is first boiled for five minutes, and then the fruit is put in and kept as whole as possible by careful stirring with a wooden spoon; boil fifteen minutes, then bottle.

R. D.—"P.F.C." on a card are the initials of the French words *Pour Prendre Conge*, "to take leave," and are generally intended to show that the person is going out of town or abroad. "R.S.V.P." stands for *Repondez si vous plait*, and means "answer if you please." The letters are generally appended to an invitation.

W. D. B.—The lines,
"Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself both said,
This is my own, my native land,"
is from Sir Walter Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel."

F. G. P.—Parliaments, unless dissolved, last seven years, and then die a natural death, and there must be a general election. The Septennial Act was passed on the 7th of May, 1716. There has often been agitation to return to triennial parliaments, but it has hitherto been quite unsuccessful.

AMANDA.—Sponge may be bleached almost white by repetitions of the following process: Soak it in diluted muriatic acid ten or twelve hours, then wash it with water and immerse in a solution of hyposulphate of soda to which a small quantity of diluted muriatic acid has been added. Wash and dry.

G. H.—We are glad to hear that the publication of the article was of so much value to many of our readers, and hope that those who have settled in your colony will be benefited by the venture. The statement referred to was taken from an encyclopedia, and was made up from a general average of temperature.

STUDIOUS JAM.—The mere rotation of a ball about its axis in still air would not produce any other motion. A paddle wheel could be so constructed, like the sails of some windmills, as to give by its rotation a force sufficient to propel a balloon, if there were engines light enough to be raised to furnish the power.

B. D.—The titles of honour in the English peerage are five—duke, marquis, earl, viscount, and baron. The eldest sons of peers have no real title of honour legally any more than an ordinary commoner, but it is customary for them to take the second title in the family, simply however as a courtesy title.

DAIRY R.—The name Martello as applied to the towers, now gradually disappearing, is derived from one built at Martella Bay, in Corsica, which offered a determined resistance to the English troops in 1794. Those in this country were erected to repel the threatened invasion of Napoleon I.

BURBODY.—The lines—
"The reason firm and temperate will
Endurance, foresight, judgment, skill,
A perfect woman nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, to command,"
are by Wordsworth.

B. M. T.—If both parties wear gloves, it is not necessary that each remove them in shaking hands; if one, however, has ungloved hands, it is courtesy for the other to remove the glove, unless in so doing it would cause an awkward pause, in which case apologies for not removing it by saying, "Excuse my glove." The words and forms will always vary much depend upon circumstances, of which individuals can themselves best judge.

M. T. B.—1. We do not think it would be proper for a gentleman, who had only been acquainted with a lady two months, to kiss her, or even to ask permission to kiss her. 2. No young lady of a proper respect for her good name would allow a gentleman to kiss her, no matter how long standing might be their acquaintance, unless she had first been asked by him for her company, and also been asked to become his wife. 3. Near relatives, such as a brother or an uncle, may with propriety kiss their kinswomen.

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